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IRISH HERITAGE

THE LANDSCAPE, THE PEOPLE AND THEIR WORK

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with illustrations by the author

1942
W. TEMPEST, DUNDALGAN PRESS
DUNDALK

[p. i]

[pp. ii-iv have no text material]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

142
291
243

CORN HARVEST

[frontispiece]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My heaviest debt is to the friendly countryfolk and craftsmen in all parts of Ireland who have shared my interests or suffered my questions. I owe much to scientific friends, North and South, with whom I have discussed various points from time to time, and I am grateful to Dr. Delargy and the staff of the Irish Folklore Commission for their interest and encouragement, although circumstances have prevented me from making use of their great store of records so freely offered. Most of my material has been gathered over a number of years during field-work in geography and archæology, supplemented by systematic surveys of certain areas undertaken with students of my department or with members of the Le Play Society working under my direction. Several of my past students have supplied me with information gathered in the course of their researches: I may refer particularly to Mr. J. M. Mogey. I have followed with interest and profited by the promising survey work of the Swedish school of ethnology which, interrupted by the war, has borne its first-fruits in the form of three articles by its director, Dr. A. Campbell. The Harvard University Mission to Ireland has given us an admirable study of *The Irish Countryman*, by Dr. C. M. Arensberg, and there is promise of more to come. Two recent historical works—E. MacLysaght's *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* and Professor C. Maxwell's *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*—bear welcome witness to the growth of interest in peasant life, but the plea made to historians by D. Lindsay Keir (in the *Bulletin of the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences*, No. 14, 1941) is worth recalling: he stresses the need " to see clearly the condition of the Roman Catholic church in eighteenth century Ireland as an organised institution ; to trace the conservation, through it, or by other means, of traditions and ways of life anterior to the eighteenth century." The vast field of Gaelic literature and legendary history remains almost unexplored as a source for the critical study of ancient geography, of economic and social history, in the light of present-day knowledge.

On the geographical side there is little to draw on, but Grenville Cole's stimulating essay, "*Ireland the Outpost*," and the regional sections of W. Fitzgerald's, *The Historical Geography of Early Ireland* must be mentioned.

To the curators and staffs of several museums I am indebted for many courtesies and for permission to sketch objects under their care : Mr. A. Deane and Mr. A. George (Belfast Municipal Museum) for Figs. 33d, 69 (left) and 70 ; Dr. J. Raftery and Mr. M. Duignan (National Museum, Dublin) for Figs. 16, 17, 32, 57, 58, 77, 78 (No. 5), 79, 80, 92 (lower), 94 (top right) and 113 ; Monsignor Hynes (Galway University College Museum) for Figs. 81, 82, 88 (lower) and 100 ; Mr. T. G. F. Paterson (County Museum, Armagh) for Figs. 36, 44 and 109. Fig. 46 is taken from a photograph by the late R. J. Welch, Fig. 33e from photographs by Mr. O. Davies, and Fig. 47 from a drawing by Mr. T. G. F. Paterson. Nearly all the other objects illustrated have been drawn in their natural settings up and down the country. The Lisburn eel-spear (Fig. 94) was kindly contributed by Mr. Colin Middleton, the farm basket (Fig. 54) by Miss E. B. Sibbett, Fig. 110 by a former student, Mr. P. Stinson, and Figs. 9, 39, 40 and the Tailpiece by Mr. H. G. Tempest.

For the loan of blocks I have to thank the editors of *Geography* (Professor H. J. Fleure)—Figs. 13 and 14—and of the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* (Mr. J. A. S. Stendall)—Plate IV, from photographs by the late R. J. Welch. The Committee of the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (Mr. O. Davies, editor-in-chief) has been very generous in allowing me to use Plates I to III and Plate VI ; also Figs. 1 (from a drawing by Miss

M. E. Rea), 6, 7 (by courtesy of Dr. J. Raftery and the artist, CCO Mr. H. E. Kilbride-Jones), 23, 24, 83, 85, 97 and 98 (by a former student, Mr. P. O'Neill) 99, and 111 (from drawings by Miss E. Kinnaird). Fig. 84 is reproduced by kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland and Plate V is from a photograph generously supplied by Mr. T. H. Mason, in whose magnificently illustrated book, *The Islands of Ireland*, it has already appeared. To Mr. S. T. C. Langford I am indebted for the use of his photograph of the reaper as Frontispiece. The Irish eskers on Fig. 2 are taken from a map prepared by Professor J. K. Charlesworth. Figs. 8 and 107 are borrowed from W. Fitzgerald's *The Historical Geography of Early Ireland* by kind permission of the author and publishers, Messrs. George Philip and Son.

My colleague, Mr. A. J. Allaway, has been good enough to read through the proofs at short notice and I have profited from his observations. Finally I wish to record my indebtedness to my publisher, Mr. H. G. Tempest, not only for inviting me to write this book, but for his constant interest and careful supervision.

For convenience of reference every effort has been made 128 to place the illustrations in close proximity to the relevant part of the text, but this has not always been possible and the reader will find it useful to consult the list of illustrations on page xiii as a guide. The pages on which drawings occur are also shown in italics in the index. In a work of this kind I have not thought it necessary to encumber the text with footnotes and references. These must await full scientific publication.

E. Estyn Evans.

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Belfast.

[p. viii is blank]

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CONTENTS.

Introduction 1
I. The Real Ireland 5
II. How Ireland Took Shape .. 15
III. The Landscape: The Beginnings .. 23
IV. The Work of Man: Crops and Animals 29
V. Woodlands, Fields, Fences and Gates 39
VI. Village and Booley 47
VII. The Irish Peasant House 57
VIII. The Interior of the House: Fireside and Food 67
IX. Farm Buildings 79
X. Seedtime 87
XI. Harvest 95
XII. Carts and Roads 105
XIII. Spades 113
XIV. Wood, Skin, Straw and Rush Work 121
XV. The Bog 133
XVI. The Seashore 143
XVII. Festivals and Fairs: The Country Town 153
XVIII. Some Customs and Beliefs: I .. 163
XIX. Some Customs and Beliefs: II .. 171

[p. ix]

000

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

In a number of plates, the blocks very kindly lent were originally made for quarto pages. From this cause the margins in some cases unfortunately have had to be much narrower than is usual or desirable.

[p. x]

LIST OF PLATES.

CORN HARVEST, *frontispiece*

Plate *opp. page*

I. TREE ROOTS IN BOG FACE, ARMOY, CO. ANTRIM 24

II. TWO VIEWS OF LEGANANNY "DOLMEN," CO. DOWN 32

III. TYPES OF THATCH:
  1. SCOLLOP THATCH OF MARROM GRASS, MAGILLIGAN, CO. DERRY 56
  2. ROPED THATCH OF RYE STRAW, ARTICLAVE, CO. DERRY 56
  3. THATCHED ROOF SECURED WITH PEGGED FIR-ROPES, NORTH ANTRIM 56

IV. FOUR TYPES OF ONE-HORSE CARS, GLENS OF ANTRIM:
  1. SLIDE-CAR WITH KISH: STRAW HARNESS. 104
  2. LOW-BACK CAR. 104
  3. BOX-CAR WITH DISC WHEELS. 104
  4. SPOKE-WHEELED CAR. 104

V. MAKING A SKIB, ARAN ISLANDS. CREEL RODS STUCK IN GROUND BEHIND 120

VI. STAGES IN MAKING OF SHEEPHAVEN CURRAGH, CO. DONEGAL:
  1. LASHING FRAME. 144
  2. LASHING "BOW-STRINGERS." A DIFFICULT TASK. 144
  3. FIXING COUPLE-ENDS TO THE GUNWALE. 144
  4. COVERED AND READY FOR USE. 144

[p. xi]

[p. xii is blank]

000

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Fig. *page*
1. Map: Ireland and the seaways of "Atlantic" Europe 9
2. Map: Ireland, some physical features .. 17
3. Drumlin landscape of the N.W. with quartzite cone behind 20
4. Boyne curragh 27
5. Fashions in pots 30
6. Ornament on a Bronze Age pottery vessel, Tyrone (about 700 B.C.) 31
7. Bronze disc of the Early Iron Age from River Bann (about 300 A.D.) 33
8. Map: Ireland, annual rainfall 35
9. Dolmen, Co. Donegal 38
10. Irish ditch, Co. Down 41
11. Gate pillars and stone stiles, Antrim and Meath 43
12. Iron gate styles, Glendun, Co. Antrim .. 44
13. Two Donegal townlands in 1834, showing village clusters .. 49
14. The same, showing scattered dwellings and separate holdings (Einzelhöfe) in 1902-3 49
15. Bullock's "horn," Murlough, Co. Antrim .. 52
16. Rush rattle, Co. Mayo. Small stones or beads inside 54
17. Rush butterfly cage, N. Ireland 54
18. Rush "fruog" (bilberry) basket, Co. Antrim .. 55
19. House types, Co. Donegal and Co. Galway .. 59
20. A coupled roof, Co. Donegal 62
21. Tie of fir-rope, Co. Down 63
22. Methods of securing thatch 64
23. Scollop thatch 65
24. Tools of a scollop thatcher 65
25. Iron pot-rest, Glendun, Co. Antrim 67
26. Creepie 67
27. Co. Armagh, cottage hearth with brace, Derryinver 69
28. Co. Armagh, cottage hearth with brace, jamb-wall and jamb-window, Derrytrasna 69

[p. xiii]

080

Fig. *page*
29. A Donegal hearth, showing keeping-holes, besom, short tongs, crane and pot-hanger (crook) 71
30. Wooden and iron beetles, Co. Antrim, beetle of bog-fir, Co. Donegal, and potato masher, Armagh (for making potato bread) .. 72
31. Potato basket (skib or skeehogue), Garvagh, Co. Derry 73
32. Bread " stick," Co. Galway 73
33. Oatcake toasters (harnen stands) Ulster a-d, iron ; e, stone 74
34. Pot-oven, griddle and three-legged pot, Antrim 75
35. Bools (hangers) for griddle and pots, Co. Antrim 75
36. Wooden fire-crane, Co. Armagh 76
37. Rush light, candle and fir-split holders a-c Armagh ; d and e, Antrim .. 76
38. Two views of corbelled henhouse, Lecale, Co. Down 82
39. Corbelled pigsty, Co. Louth 83
40. Corbelled sweathouse, Co. Louth 83
41. Corbelled well, Kilclief, Co. Down 84
42. A " flat roof," Lecale, Co. Down 85
43. Wooden plough 89
44. Mell or maul for breaking clods, Co. Armagh .. 90
45. Old cultivation-ridges and remains of rath, Scrabo, Co. Down 90
46. Potato lazy-beds, Co. Antrim 92
47. Dibber or " stamp," Co. Armagh 93
48. Weeding clips, Co. Armagh and Co. Antrim .. 94
49. Lapping hay, Glendun, Co. Antrim 96
50. Making hay-rope, Glendun, Co. Antrim .. 97
51. Spiral method of roping haystack, Co. Donegal 99
52. Lint-band, Co. Antrim 99
53. Sickle and reaping hook 100
54. Wicker farm basket, North Antrim 102
55. Potato " basket," North Antrim 103
56. Donegal straddle 106
57. Straw pads and straddle for creels, Co. Galway 107
58. Creel with falling bottom, Tuam 107
59. Slipe and slide-car, Glendun, Co. Antrim .. 108

Fig. *page*
60. Low-back car, Mourne, Co. Down 109
61. One and two-eared spades: Longford loy and Sligo taper spade 113
62. The Fermanagh spade showing expanding mouth and cranked lift 114
63. The Kerry fack 116
64. Mountain draining spade, Co. Antrim . . 117
65. Long-handled shovel (general pattern) and digging fork, Co. Cork 119
66. Sheaf pike, Co. Meath, hay fork, Co. Fermanagh, and turf fork, Co. Antrim 119
67. Milk churns with types of dashers and cross-section of churn 122
68. Butter tubs (one with stone cover) and piggin, Gweedore, Co. Donegal 122
69. Noggins of oak and ash, Co. Tyrone; bog-fir and sally, Co. Donegal 123
70. Butter stamp and ladle, Co. Antrim 123
71. Sheepskin "wight" and split-ash corn riddle, Co. Antrim 124
72. Types of flails, Antrim, Armagh and Donegal . . 125
73. Yarn holder, Torr Head, Co. Antrim 126
74. Calf muzzles or "baskets," Clare and Antrim . . 127
75. Basket-maker's cleaver, Lough Neagh, Co. Antrim 127
76. Line-baskets, Co. Antrim and Co. Galway . . 128
77. Coiled straw basket and bone pin used in making, Aran I. 128
77a. Bee-hive, Dunluce, Co. Antrim 128
78. Types of thraw-hooks for making sugán . . 129
79. Straw hen-nest, Co. Clare 129
80. Rush burden-rope, Donegal 130
81. Grass (Manilla) burden-rope, Aran I. 130
82. Hay-knife, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway 134
83. The flachter in use, Coolnagoppoge, Co. Antrim 134
84. Flachter in "at rest" position 134
85. Types of flachters and breast-plough (no. 3), Antrim, Tyrone and Derry 135
86. Underfoot turf spade, Co. Derry 136

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

080

Fig. *page*
87. Slane fitted with cow's horn hand-grip, Glendun, Co. Antrim 137
88. Flat turf spade, Co. Derry, "Diamond" turf spade (Loughrea) and foot slane with spade-tree, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway .. 137
89. Some slane shapes : the examples from Ballymena and Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, are breast slanes 138
90. Turf barrows, Co. Meath and Co. Antrim .. 138
91. Carrying basket for turf, Co. Armagh .. 140
92. Bog-fir hatchet, Co. Armagh, and rooter, Co. Galway 140
93. Turf stack, footings, castles, spread turf, etc., Co. Antrim 141
94. Handline and frog, Co. Down. Eel-spears, Galway and Antrim 144
95. Stone sinker and weight, North Antrim .. 146
96. River net for poaching, Co. Donegal 146
97. The Bunbeg paddle-curragh, Co. Donegal, with types of paddle, old and new 148
98. The rowing-curragh of Sheephaven, Donegal .. 149
99. Curragh oar, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal .. 147
100. Shark harpoon, Aran I. 150
101. Kelp kilns, Galway, Antrim and Clare .. 150
102. Kelp hooks, Connacht 151
103. Kelp knife and drag, North Antrim 151
104. Crab pot, North Antrim, and lobster pot, Co. Kerry 151
105. Crusie fish-oil lamp, Rathlin, Co. Antrim .. 152
106. St. Bridget's Crosses, Co. Armagh 154
107. A market town with scattered country population : each dot represents a building .. 159
108. Map of Ireland : population 160
109. Knuckle-dusters worn at fairs, Co. Armagh .. 161
110. Fair Day 162
111. "Bullauns" from old church sites, Co. Antrim and Co. Derry 165
112. Straw wedding-dance mask, Co. Mayo .. 172
113. Bull-roarer, Clear I., Co. Cork 175
114. Harvest knots, Co. Derry and Co. Down .. 177
Tail-piece : A Fairy Thorn 178

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

INTRODUCTION.

The cleavage between town and country has grown 369 steadily sharper in Britain since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, and has recently been emphasised by the partial failure of evacuation schemes. As a result, closer attention is being given to the problems of the countryside, and, reflecting this interest, stories of Farmer Giles have given way to a flood of books recording the details of his daily and seasonal tools and tasks.

Outside the capital cities of Dublin and Belfast the cleavage between town and country has not gone very deep in Ireland; and even in Belfast business men and doctors are rarely more than a generation or two "off the land." In Eire 63% of the population is "rural dwelling," that is living outside "towns" with over 200 inhabitants. The corresponding figure for Britain would be well below 20%. Even in Northern Ireland, despite its great manufacturing industries, farming remains the most important industry, and 50% of the population lives in rural areas. Yet the younger people, at least, are often ignorant of the affairs of the countryside, and what is worse find no interest in them. I was recently approached in Co. Antrim by evacuated boys in their teens who wanted to know if a bunch of acorns they carried were hazel nuts!

This book does not pretend to be more than an 121 introduction to a vast subject of inexhaustible interest, and I am fully conscious of the risks involved in venturing into an unexplored field and attempting to summarise its varied

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

|2| features: each of the following chapters could without difficulty be expanded into a book. The so-called Celtic fringe is in reality a broad mantle of fascinating pattern and colour. While I have tried to give summary accounts applying to Ireland as a whole, most of my material is drawn from Ulster, a province which, although six of its nine counties are politically separated from the rest of the island, is, archæologically at any rate, its most representative region and has its full share of country relics. When districts or counties are mentioned it must not be assumed that they are the only places where the practices or objects referred to occur. They happen to be examples which have come under my notice, and they are located not because they occur nowhere else, but because it is a scientific duty to record locations. I have not concentrated on the Gaeltacht in seeking survivals: I have rather been concerned to show how widespread are the customs and habits which are popularly supposed to be the peculiar possession of the Irish-speaking districts. Consequently I have not given Gaelic terms except in so far as they may be hidden in dialect words which I have, as a rule, spelt phonetically. They are for the most part the terms used in counties Antrim and Down. There are some obvious omissions in the topics discussed: I have deliberately said very little, for instance, about the homespun industry with all its varied gear and traditions, because it is fairly well known. Nor have I ventured into the controversial realms of religion or politics.

The Ireland I am writing about is one which is passing away, and some of the customs and tools described and illustrated in the following pages have almost entirely gone, but I have learnt that it is rarely safe to use the past tense in writing about Irish matters. I have more than once come across customs which were described as dead half a century ago: the old ways are an unconscionable time a-dying. When ancient arts and crafts become dissociated from the control of magical practices (*cf.* Chapters 18 and 19), decline often sets in. It is now realized that deterioration has been

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

a powerful factor in the history of human culture, and that it 121
needs spiritual as well as economic force to bring about new growth. But I am no supporter of those who, indulging in sentimental regrets for a Celtic twilight of doubtful authenticity, find in the past a Golden Age to which they would have us return. Our view should be forward. There is in Ireland, thanks to the astonishing virility of peasant tradition, a great opportunity to save and transform rural life, as happened in Denmark, before it has declined too far. In that revival education must play its part. A geographer may be forgiven for attributing the general ignorance about the foundations of rural culture to the very backward position of geography teaching in Ireland, where none of the Universities has given the subject full recognition—a state of affairs perhaps unparalleled in any part of Europe. Moreover, [871]
except for a few well-equipped and well-staffed schools, the standard of geography teaching in the schools is half a century behind the times.

Peasant ownership, for good or ill—it has not so far 423
provided the answer to Ireland's problems—is now established. In Northern Ireland 38% of the farm holdings are under 15 acres in extent and only 4% exceed 100 acres: 27½% are between 15 and 30 acres (the corresponding figure in Eire is 27%). Cheap electricity may provide a basis for restoring 000
rural industries as an essential and intimate part of the life of the countryside. The undoubted virtues of the Ulster character were surely related to the traditions of peasant weavers before that tradition was submerged in the Industrial Revolution. The essentials of the country craft—simplicity of form, soundness of construction and fitness to purpose—must somehow be restored. The traditional skill in wood working can be revived: re-afforestation should be undertaken on bold lines, and every effort made to save the native flora and fauna from further destruction. The difficulties of the present time are forcing on our attention the view expressed by many leading thinkers, that the rural tradition is of special importance for the maintenance of society, and that there are

OOOspiritual and aesthetic as well as economic dangers in rural depopulation and decay. The material put together in the following pages will, it is hoped, provide an incentive to further research into the past as well as the present, for without understanding the past how can we hope to plan for the future? An eminent anthropologist has said that "survivals have the best chances of surviving in the long run." By no means all the customs described in the following pages are worth preserving, but the best of them can be retained and developed.

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CHAPTER I.

THE REAL IRELAND.

Many aspects of Irish rural life—its charm, its politics, humour and tragedy—have been expressed or exploited in prose, verse and drama, but it is astonishing how little has been written about the daily life of the Irish country man or the physical and social environments in which he moves and works. Even an introductory survey of folk-culture is at present an adventure into ill-charted seas. Yet this Ireland is not only a treasure-house of old ways unrivalled in western Europe but a working example of peasant culture of the highest scientific interest. Whereas Europe north of the Alpine mountains has enjoyed full civic life for a period that can be counted in centuries rather than in millennia, its peasant traditions are of immemorial antiquity. In Ireland we have a unique opportunity of studying the dwellings, tools and customs of a venerable social order which is admittedly dying but has by no means entirely gone. It is surely here, in the activities of a fascinating countryside, that the real Ireland may be found. 114

There has been, in recent years, a slow growth of scientific interest in these matters, but it is typical of this country that attention concentrates on things of the spirit, and tribute must be paid to the work of the Irish Folklore Commission which is busy gathering and classifying material—folktales, songs, old customs and beliefs—from every barony in the country. It would need a separate commission, backed by folk museums on Scandinavian lines, to study, collect and preserve representative examples of the crafts and industries of rural Ireland. The pioneer efforts of Dr. A. C. Haddon in the west of Ireland over half a century ago have not been followed up: indeed there was a feeling that the secrets of peasant life must not be exposed to the prying eye of the enquirer. We have had many glowing eulogies of Irish hearths and homespuns, but this gets us no further than the adverse comments on " wretched cabins " and " mere hovels " which provoke them or the endless tales of " pigs, pipers, praties and poteen." Between prejudice and sentiment disinterested science could find no place, and facts of the greatest ethnological interest went unrecorded in the heat of irrelevant argument. For Ireland has preserved to a remarkable degree the customs and social habits of the pre-industrial phase of western civilisation. It has escaped, even in many parts of the north-east where modern industry has taken root, the devastating changes brought about in England by the industrial revolution, and most of the country was saved also from the repressive spirit of seventeenth century puritanism. The archæologist in Ireland is constantly coming up against customs still practised (or, to his sorrow, remembered but now dead) which have survived through the centuries from a past without history. They come down to us from the beginning, leaving little record of their passage through time, so that " History," in the words of Punch, " somehow seems to miss, interesting points like this."

It is with some of these things that persist out of the wonder of the past that we shall be dealing. We may deplore the lack of interest shown by Irishmen in the relics of ancient culture that lie about them. The truth is that they are so much a part of the present that their significance is not readily appreciated: it is as if, to the peasant mind, " all time is foreshortened into a living present."[1] But one by one the relics of the past, inter-related as they are, pass away unrecorded.

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[1] See " An Interpretation of Irish Culture," *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, January 1941, pp. 12-18.

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Even the elaborately produced and comprehensive Handbook of the Irish Free State (1927), which includes chapters on folklore and literature, remains silent on folk-culture and its significance for an understanding of Irish problems. 114

Our knowledge of the Irish countryside will advance only through field-study and the mapping of our findings. The time has not yet come when one can prepare maps of cultural distributions, but this is the end in view. Our school-books and atlases still give us maps which are purely political and administrative, for the political outlook has kept scientific interests at bay. We need maps of house-types and styles of furniture, of farm implements and the lay-out of fields and fences, of boat-types, of dialects and superstitions, and so on; and we must study these distributions both against the physical and spiritual environments of Ireland and against the wider background of their overseas connexions.

Viewed in its wider setting Ireland is part of the north-western or "Atlantic" province of European folk-culture. The climatic background of storms and mists makes it one with the coastlands and peninsulas which range from Galicia through Brittany and Highland Britain to the fiords of Norway. Everywhere in this region the sea is close at hand: by it man can both gain a livelihood and escape out into a wider world. On land the cultivation of wheat is near its climatic limits, and the dependence on spring-sown cereals greatly simplified the old schemes of crop-rotation. The folding of stock around the winter homestead was not complicated by the necessity of protecting the corn from their depredations. Animal husbandry and stock products are the pivot of rural economy in this humid fringe of Europe, a fact which, together with the independence nourished by man's association with the sea, helped to keep the north-western province out of the bondage of the feudal system. 101

While the simplicity of stock-raising equipment has limited the development of the arts and crafts as compared with, say, the south-eastern province of Europe, or even lowland England, it brings its compensations. As Professor 181

181 Fleure writes of Wales, another section of "The Celtic Fringe": "the isolated rural communities are, of themselves, poor in material resources, and their efforts have, therefore, not until recently gone into great buildings or sculpture or painting or orchestral music, all demanding a large equipment. Rather have they found their scope in poetry and oratory and song, arts in which the poorest labourer can often compete on fairly equal terms with his richer neighbours. In this way, and in others as well, poverty has been a safeguard of an intensely democratic feeling as well as a help towards the survival of the language and its associations." In the field of human export, too, Ireland's products are scholars, doctors and poets as well as spade-workers.

243 There are, as we shall try to show, many other features
262 of Irish life which can be related to the pastoral tradition.
114 Because of its value as fodder and for reasons of soil and
climate, oats is the "corn" crop of Atlantic Europe. Apart
from the value of oats as food for livestock, oatmeal in various
forms has been and still is largely consumed, and its baking
into thin pan bread over an open fire instead of in an oven has
helped to preserve the prehistoric open hearth with its varied
114 and interesting gear and traditions. Ignoring the literary
and archæological evidence, many writers have assumed that
the inhabitants of ancient Ireland were entirely pastoral and
nomadic. On this topic much solemn nonsense has been
written, and it gained wide currency because it seemed both
to condemn the Irish and to corroborate the prevailing view
of man's cultural evolution from hunter to agriculturist
through a stage of pastoral nomadism. It now seems certain
that man learnt the elements of cultivation at least as soon as
he learnt how to domesticate animals, and in the diffusion of
these ideas through Europe from the Near East, Ireland
received the germs of both sources of food-production at about
114 the same period, let us say 4,000 years ago. There are many
221 signs that in Ireland's dark and middle ages cattle played an
even greater role in rural life than in earlier prehistory and
later history, but at all times the unit of the fixed family

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

101
175

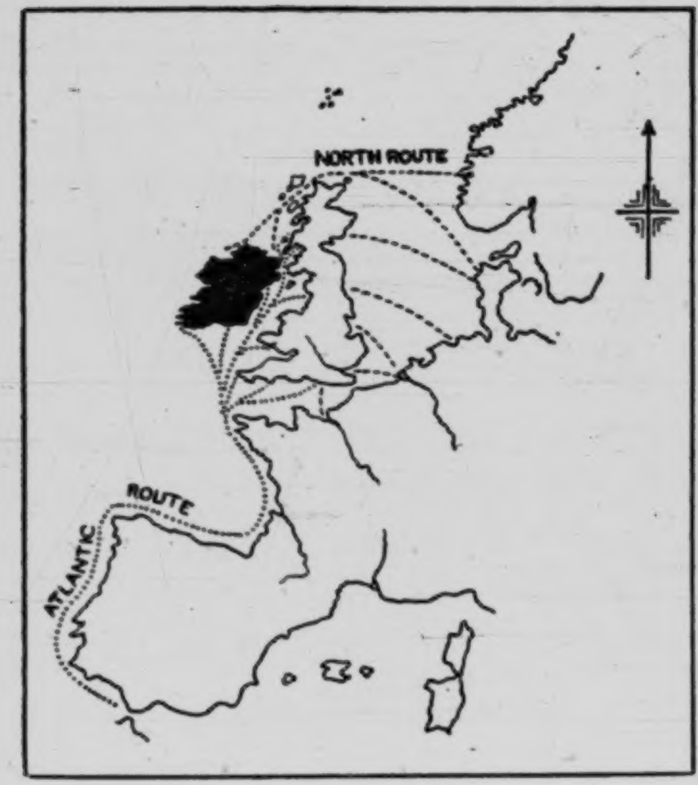
NORTH ROUTE
ATLANTIC
ROUTE

Fig. 1. Ireland and the seaways of "Atlantic" Europe.

The routes from the south brought ancient civilization to the island about 2000 B.C.

[p.9]

114 221 settlement, the baile or townland, kept its significance and its importance. In many cases what has passed for nomadism has been the ancient and normal practice of seasonal movement to the hill pastures, which is still not entirely abandoned and has left many traces in the life and landscape of the country (Chapter 6).

181 462 In essentials Ireland is and has been a peasant country, and it may be well to examine objectively some of the general characteristics of peasant society. A permanent link with the soil on which man lives and works is the essence of a peasantry; and in this work of the fields woman co-operates with man. For her, however, field work is a secondary task since her main interests must lie in the house and in the milking of the stock. Work with spade and plough and the care of the draught animals is for the men, although carrying—necessarily done by women in primitive communities where the men must have their hands free to use their weapons—often remains an activity of the peasant woman where not entirely superseded by animal transport. Where fishing and shore-collecting engage the men's attention the women's sphere of action and responsibilities are widened.

181 323 Among tasks in which the women of some peasantries play a leading part is the making of domestic pottery, but this tradition, though strong in Neolithic Ireland, gave way to the use of metal "pots" and vessels of wood, the making of which was the work of the men. Nor have local survivals of hand-made pottery, like the Barvas ware of the Hebrides, been recorded here.

181 443 796 Periodic gatherings for exchange and social intercourse are a feature of peasant life which has contributed to the growth of towns. The immemorial meetings in fairs and markets have been weakened by modern means of transport and by government marketing boards; and in some parts of the country the whole fabric of rural society is being undermined in consequence. As in North Africa to-day, the fairs were often held near some ancient burial place, and the assemblies were linked with religious festivals which brought

people together. Seasonal festivals celebrating the major 181
operations of the agricultural calendar are a primary part of 443
peasant life: thus spring and autumn were the main fair 796
seasons. In the licence permitted at these gatherings we may
detect an echo of the ritual of fertility magic designed to
ensure the success of seedtime and harvest.

Sympathetic magic, already present in the minds of the 181
cave-artists of the Old Stone Age, who painted life-like pictures 789
of animals in the hope of good hunting, may be defined as the
symbolic carrying out of certain deeds in order to promote
success in another field of action. A peasant community is
fully conscious of its dependence on the powers that bring
rain and sunshine: these powers must be conciliated and
encouraged. In the face of the untamed ocean in particular,
man's superstitious regard for the menace of nature dies hard,
while the survival of wakes for the dead, of the veneration of
trees, wells and standing stones, of customs concerning cattle
and fire, is a lasting tribute to the power of magic.

From the sociological view-point the idea of sympathetic 181
magic has had an important consequence in the tendency, 842
common to all peasantries, to regard child-bearing as part of
the ritual necessary to bring success in cultivation. The
large families of rural Ireland are one aspect of this; another
is the ill-omen attached to unmarried women. Barrenness
tends to be regarded as a curse and a disgrace. But the years
since the famine have seen great changes in the ages of 181
marriage—the average of 29 for Irish women is one of the [582]
highest in the world—and in the proportions between the
sexes: this is a subject badly in need of investigation.
Statistical and economic studies we must have, but we need
also to regard man as something more than a profit-making
being. Peasant society is only to a limited extent drawn
into the world of money: rural debts are often merely the
sign of a social obligation. It is with the maintenance and
continuity of society that the peasant community is concerned:
hence its importance for the future of civilisation.

While communal schemes and the manifold rights and 181
duties of the peasant have been disturbed by landlordism and 476

181 individual ownership they have by no means entirely collapsed.
476 The principle of service, of mutual aid within the local family
groups, survives; the element of competition is reduced to a
minimum. Though the old social laws have been "abolished"
by acts of parliament, such external decrees could destroy
only the superficial features and hardly touched the minds in
181 which these customs were rooted. The primary unit of land
631 division—the townland—is still a very real thing; and as the
townland retains its Gaelic name even in the districts of
Dublin and Belfast, so there survives beyond the city's
influence the social fabric of the townland community.
Reeves and Joyce have argued that the careful subdivision of
Irish land points to the existence of a considerable settled
population in remote antiquity, and recent archæological
research supports this view. There are no less than 62,205
townlands in the country; their size, which varies from
curiosities of less than an acre to large tracts of moorland of
1,000 acres, averages 325 acres.

181 The townlands in turn group themselves into baronies
631 corresponding to the petty kingdoms of old. Writers tell us
291 that even into the 19th century one barony could be easily
distinguished from another by the dresses peculiar to each.
Thus there were the dark blue and damson of Cork and
Waterford, the grey of Kerry and the blue of Galway. A
traveller in 1830 remarked wisely that "such peculiarities
frequently point out the natural divisions of a country in more
important matters than dress": they are an index to
regional diversity. The distinctive features of particular
districts are well illustrated in the case of "the Irish Flanders,"
the isolated tract in Co. Wexford comprising the baronies of
Bargy and Forth; while nothing could reveal the separateness
of some island communities better than the heaviest punishment
meted out to offenders in Rathlin or Clear I.: it consisted
of "banishment to Ireland."

000 Enough has been said to suggest that the traditions of
the Irish countryside are of long standing, and that many
strains in those traditions are not only of Celtic but of pre-Celtic
antiquity. Before we consider some of the relics of the

past it is necessary to say something of the country itself. 000 How is it possible to understand the genius of a people without knowing something of the environment in which it arose? Irishmen overseas do not make new Irelands: Irish peasant life is inseparable from the country which helped to mould it. We must have our eyes fixed on both man and his environment. The whole story of human culture is indissolubly bound up with the landscape which it has both influenced and been influenced by. In the words of W. H. Hudson: "Every feature of the landscape, everything that we see, hear, smell and feel, enters not into the body only, but into the soul, and helps to shape and colour it."

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
- ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER II.

HOW IRELAND TOOK SHAPE.

101
131 "To comprehend the homestead and its home-folk, from the thatch of the roof to the colour of the children's hair, we must find the locality on the domed surface of the earth, and must realize that this earth is a very large and dominant region round it." So wrote the late Grenville Cole, wisest of Ireland's geographers. This island, then, lies in the warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean, midway between the Lofoten Islands and the Straits of Gibraltar, a detached but not isolated fragment of the drowned coast of Eurasia. Throughout the ages, as Europe sank repeatedly under the waters of the ocean, this outer margin, worn down by rains and rivers, received fresh marine deposits over and over again, so that its rocks record all the main features of the history of western Europe.

133
175 Lying in the middle latitudes of the continent, it shares the converging mountain systems of north and south, the older axis of Scandinavia dominating the build of the north of Ireland while the younger axis linked with France and Spain prevails in the south. The lead thus given in the remote ages of geology has been followed, over and over again, by man and his cultures converging on this last outpost of Europe. From across the Atlantic, too, Ireland has received much in recent centuries; here the alien potato was first welcomed; and it was the "praty" which drove masses of Irishmen back along the route it had itself taken. "Ireland lieth aloof in

[p, 15]
[p. 14 is blank]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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133 the West Ocean," wrote Campion, but one cannot attempt to
175 interpret Ireland without reference to its neighbouring lands
and seas. The links with Britain are strongest and oldest, alike in geology and history, in the north-east. Here both rocks and men have common roots on both sides of the North Channel: from Carlingford round to Swilly this "Region of the Loughs" looks out towards familiar coasts and islands. In geology as in history, it is as difficult to consider Ireland apart from Britain as the islets of Ireland apart from Ireland. A brief summary will reveal a geological story as troubled as its political history. Fig. 2.

133 The oldest rocks are the gnarled and crumpled sediments of the north and west, running in broken masses from Connemara to north Antrim. Here the resistent hardened sandstones (quartzites) stand up in conspicuous cones (Errigal, Muckish, Croagh Patrick, the Twelve Pins) while the gleaming schists are generally worn down into bog-filled hollows, though they rise to over 2,000 feet in the Sperrins. These rocks, together with great thicknesses of shales and mudstones worn off them, were involved in the great earth-ridgings named, from their presence in Scotland, "Caledonian." Further south, hard quartzites also give the Great Sugarloaf of Co. Wicklow its bold outline, while massive intrusions of molten rock forced up during the Caledonian folding cooled to give wide exposures of moorland granites both in the long chain of the Wicklows and in scattered hills of the north and west.

Next in succession came the Old Red Sandstones, formed under semi-arid conditions out of the débris of sand and pebbles rolled down from the mountains. As the sea flooded back once more, a rich marine life left behind a great thickness of limestone, still to-day, despite its solubility and rapid weathering, the most continuous and widespread of all the Irish rocks. The Great Central Plain, worn down to a uniform level, is floored with limestone, and the seas have cut into it, in Donegal and Galway Bays, so as to separate the three mountain masses of the west coast and leave Connacht projecting like a Wilder Wales from the Irish mainland.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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133

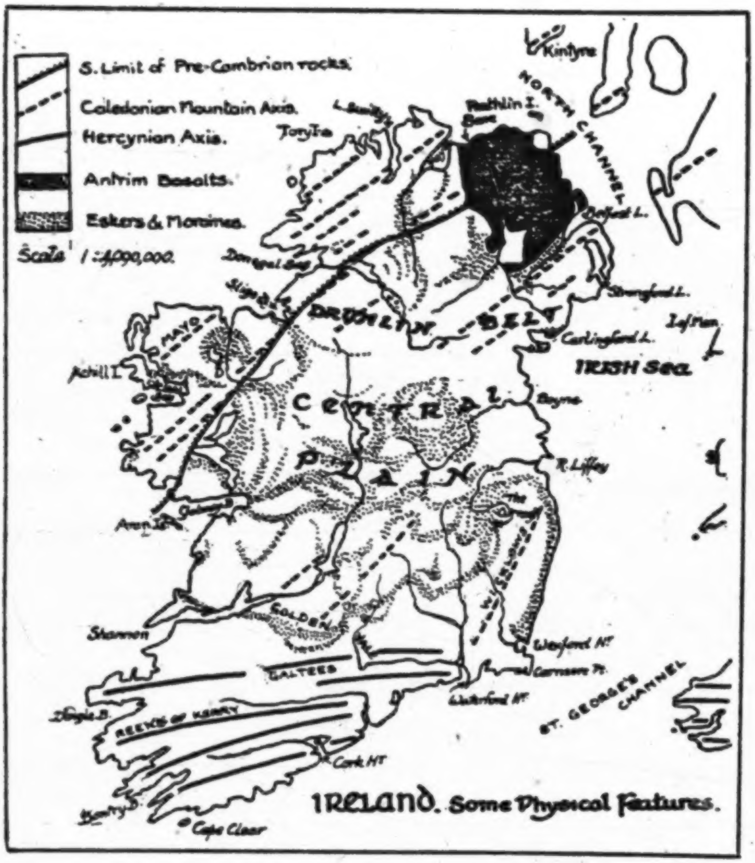
S. Limit of Pre-Cambrian rocks.
Caledonian Mountain Axis.
Hercynian Axis.
Antrim Basalts.
Eskers & Moraines.
Scale 1:4,000,000.
Kintyre
NORTH CHANNEL
Rathlin I.
Bann
L. Swilly
Tory I.
Belfast L.
Donegal Bay
Sligo B.
DRUMLIN BELT
Strangford L.
I. of Man
Carlingford L.
IRISH Sea
MAYO
Achill I.
CENTRAL PLAIN
Boyne
R. Liffey
Galway B.
Aran Is.
Shannon
GOLDEN VALE
GALTEES
Wexford Hr
Carnsore Pt.
Waterford Hr
ST. GEORGE'S CHANNEL
Dingle B.
REEKS OF KERRY
Cork Hr
Bantry B.
Cape Clear
IRELAND. Some Physical Features.

Fig. 2.

[p. 17]

c

At the end of the Carboniferous period, swamp and forest darkened the surface of the limestone, and the coal measures were laid down. Then the earth's crust was crumpled once more along lines running east and west through south Ireland and through Brittany and Spain. Thus Cork and Kerry received their folded structure and scenic features. Except for small patches the coal measures have all been worn away by the agents of denudation, and so Ireland has been saved the wealth and the poverty of an industrial revolution. The limestones too have gone from the summits of the ridges, leaving barren but picturesque masses of the underlying sandstones exposed in long mountain lines—the Reeks of Kerry, the purple hills of Killarney and the high walls of the Galtees and the Comeraghs. This folding is known as the Armorican or Hercynian—named after Brittany and the Harz Mts. respectively (Fig. 2).

Again the land rose to receive deposits of New Red Sandstones, followed by the clean chalk and sandy beaches of the Cretaceous Sea. When Ireland once more emerged, its rolling chalk downs were destined to be carved away except in the north-east, where molten rocks poured out around the North Channel to make the Antrim basalts, protecting the underlying chalk and giving this corner of Ireland its striking coast scenery of black and white rocks. In the chalk the first inhabitants of the island, coming from the Scottish coast, were to find abundant flint for their implements. During the igneous phase the granite Mournes and the Carlingford Hills were thrust up, the last additions to the Irish mountains.

From this time on, although there have been ups and downs, Ireland was never submerged beneath the sea, but before it took final shape it suffered the invasion of ice which has left its mark on every feature of the landscape. In the north-east, true to tradition, it was Scottish ice that swept over the Region of the Loughs from Swilly to Carlingford, but elsewhere the ice-fields were fed by the glaciers of Donegal, Sligo, Galway and Kerry. The great central "basin" became the dumping ground for the débris of the surrounding hills, whose rocks were scraped into the smooth rounded forms known as "roches moutonnées," or splintered, in steep rock faces above the ice, into the walls of mountain corries. Widely scattered over the plain and through the marginal valleys from Limerick to Carlow and from Cavan to Antrim are the winding ridges of sand and gravel called eskers. They mark the stages in the retreat of the ice-sheet as it melted away and left its rock rubbish to be sorted out by water into great curving dumps. To-day these "green hills," as they are often called, rise in surprising freshness of contour and colour from the level plain. They are often followed by winding tracks which thus avoid the damp plain. Fig. 2.

Elsewhere the ice left behind a solid residue of clay and boulders, often to a depth of many feet, generally levelled by flooding waters from the ice-edge but sometimes piled into shapely steep-sided hills elongated in the direction in which the ice moved. These drumlins, or "little hills," give much of the border country, from south Down through Armagh and Monaghan to Cavan, Lough Erne and Donegal Bay its characteristic scenery. Their steep sides and the confused drainage of winding streams and lakelets to which they give rise long made the drumlin country a considerable obstacle to movement; and with other physical factors it helped to isolate the north from the rest of the country in early times. Southwards over the western parts of the plain, ice scooped out hollows and blocked rivers to form lakes many of which have been filled up with bog. But on the whole the ice-sheet, through its mantle of deposits, gave more than it took away: "the cold that for a time drove out life, in the end largely contributed to the fertility of Irish land." Fig. 3.

When warmer times returned and plants and animals began to find their way to the outpost of Europe, the land stood higher than to-day. Ireland was then, as it has been through most of its geological history, an integral part of Europe, and the great Irish deer roamed over the continent from the Atlantic to the Baltic. We are now within measurable distance of modern times, say 10,000 years ago, and it is

133 possible that the first Irishmen saw the great deer before it disappeared. But again the land sank and tides swept through the North Channel while the Atlantic storms carved their way deep into the western seaboard. Drowned valleys indent the coast and the hills have their feet in the water. There have been minor oscillations since, so that the clays of Belfast and the beaches of County Antrim lie raised above water level, but the stage was now set, in the essentials of hills and valleys, clouds and rains, for man and his animals to come and do their work. Basalt and granite, sand and clay, sandstone and slate, limestone and chalk and flint—all in various ways have helped man to make the cultural landscape of fields, fences, roads and buildings.

Ireland as man first saw it, then, was an island of many mountain masses, varied in rock structure and shape, clothed with wild forests and separated by many inlets of the sea, by slow-flowing rivers and wide stretches of shallow lakes and plains. Its highest summits rise near the sea: Slieve Donard in Mourne, Errigal, the Twelve Pins, Carrantuohill, the Comeraghs, and Lugnaquilla in the Wicklows, all of them between 2,400 and 3,400 feet high, are all in sight of the sea. Yet this land of mountains has an extensive plain, averaging only 250 feet in height, set in its heart, while marginal plains are half-submerged in the north-east (Lough Neagh) in the north-west (Lough Erne) and the west (Loughs Mask and

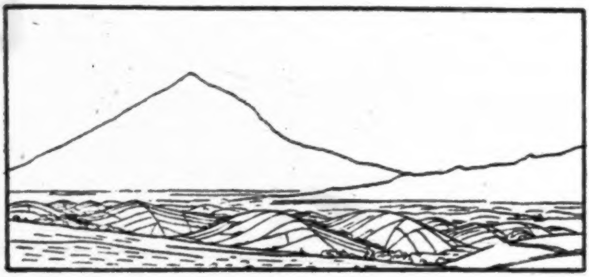

Fig. 3. Drumlin landscape of the N.W., with quartzite cone behind.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Corrib). Difficulties of communication are such that the /33 Central Plain has never been central in anything more than name: Athlone has become a national centre only with radio [207] communication, and the Shannon remains a boundary river throughout its course. The important part of the plain is the 133 fifty mile stretch which faces the Irish Sea between the bays of 175 Dundalk and Dublin, the heart of the old Kingdom of Meath and of the English Pale, and the setting of Ireland's capital sites from the sacred tombs of New Grange through the age of Celtic Tara to the historic city of Dublin. One factor in the location of this metropolitan area is suggested by Fig. 8; it [132] is favoured by the relatively low rainfall of less than 30 ins.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER III.

THE LANDSCAPE.

THE BEGINNINGS.

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137
311 The landscape of a long inhabited country like Ireland is in large measure the work of man, whose farms, fields and fences are the result of many centuries of sustained effort. One might think of the wild thorn hedges and the piled stone "ditches" as mere sample remnants of woods and stones that once covered the face of the land. The extent of the change brought about may be judged by the fact that from being a land clothed with forest from the sea-coasts high up into the mountains, Ireland to-day is the least wooded country in Europe. In this work of forest destruction man has been assisted by his domestic animals and by changes of climate which have resulted in the accumulation of bogland. It is one of the paradoxes of Ireland that while the main lines of her mountains took shape in the remote ages of geological time, wide areas are dominated by the peat deposits which have been formed in the few thousand years that have elapsed since the ice age. The contrast of age is accentuated by those of colour and relief, for far across the level brown bogs rise blue in the distance some of the oldest mountains in Europe. In the middle distance, completing the picture, will be the green hills of the eskers.

137 The heart of the island, the Irish midlands, is a veritable Black Country, black with peat, not with the grime of coal-fields. Here in the boglands there are twelve contiguous

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137 counties, none of which has any settlement of 5,000 people. Irish peat, or turf as it is properly called, covers an area of some 3 million acres and has an average depth, in the central plain, of 19 feet. Shallower deposits are very extensive in the mountains, particularly along the western seaboard from Kerry round to Inishowen. Apart from their economic [372] importance—it is estimated that they form the sole fuel supply of two-thirds of the farming population (see Chapter 15)—the peats are of great interest to scientists, and during recent years an intensive investigation, under Danish leadership, has solved many problems concerning their origin and growth.

While bogs accumulate most readily in imperfectly drained lowlands, the heavy precipitation of the mountains is the main factor in their wide distribution. The south coast, with its excellent drainage, and the dry east coast, with the exception of the Wicklows, are largely peat-free. So are many areas of limestone which, with its cracks and joints, swallows the heaviest rains. And the eskers, though they may pond the drainage and thus cause water-logging and bog formation, are themselves free of peat. Regions favourable for human settlement are thus closely related to the distribution of peat, but the control is not merely negative since access to supplies of turf is often an important consideration.

For the scientist the value of turf-bogs lies in the fact that they preserve not only wood, twigs and the seeds and fruits of plants but even the minute grains of pollen, so that as they accumulate they write their own record, a record which the pollen-analyst can read. Moreover the phases of vegetation and climate thus chronicled can be correlated with the story of Irishmen who, careless or forgetful, have left behind at different levels objects of stone, metal or wood which the archæologist can use as clues in his detective work. In this way a sequence of climate, vegetation and human industries has been worked out, and we now have an outline of the whole story from the time when the first layers of lake clay were laid down in hollows of the surface while the ice still lingered in the mountain corries: they contain remains of arctic willow and the bones of the giant deer.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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Antrim

Plate I

137

TREE ROOTS IN BOG FACE

ARMOY, CO. ANTRIM

[facing p. 24]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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137 Birch and hazel are the next vegetation recorded, then the pine spread rapidly to give way to oak and alder as the climate grew warmer. The oldest layers of turf in the deep bogs grew round the stumps of this oak forest, following the sinking of the land and the consequent bad drainage accompanying a stormy period which lasted from about 5000 to 2500 years B.C. To this climatic phase the term "Atlantic" is applied. There followed a warm dry period, called the sub-Boreal, which came to an end about the middle of the last millennium B.C.; it was during this phase that the Irish forests reached their greatest development, when oak, birch, alder, hazel and pine spread right to the western coasts and high up the mountain sides. It is estimated that the rainfall in the west was only half its present quantity and that the westerly winds were weak. When the storms returned the climate became cooler and even wetter than it is to-day, and during this "sub-Atlantic" period the western forests were submerged in extensive bogs to give the landscape its familiar barren appearance. Everywhere this dark age of storms, from about 500 B.C. to 100 B.C., was a time of maximum peat formation, layer upon layer of spongy vegetation, cotton grass, bog rush and sphagnum moss, accumulating in the hollows of the plain and on the mountain slopes. Thereafter there have been fluctuations when pine forests spread repeatedly on dried bog surfaces only to be swamped in succeeding wet phases, and in the end the pines disappeared from Ireland, leaving their resinous bog timber as a gift from the past to the treeless present. Not only timber but all organic matter such as bone, leather and even textiles and human bodies are wonderfully preserved by bog acid. Pl. I.

172 Archæology tells us that man[1] first crossed the narrow seas from Scotland when the land stood higher before the "Atlantic" submergence. Hemmed in by the forest he clung to the beaches under the flint-bearing chalk cliffs of

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[1] "Mesolithic" man. The term (Middle Stone Age) embraces the period from c. 7000-2500 B.C. falling between the Palæolithic (Old Stone) and the Neolithic (New Stone) Ages. Man's first appearance in Ireland is probably to be dated about 5000 B.C.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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172 Antrim, and excavation in the beaches at Larne and elsewhere has revealed the tools at depths which show that he remained in the area throughout the beach-forming Atlantic period. Some have conjectured that his flint knives and choppers were used for wood-working and boat-building. When fishing failed he had recourse to shell-fish, for the warm seas which replaced the Arctic waters had brought great quantities of edible molluscs to our shores. From the beginning, then, the north-east, the region of the Loughs, was the bridgehead by which overseas movements reached Ireland.

When at length, perhaps under pressure from further incursions from Scotland, the coast-dwellers moved on, it was in the Bann valley, by Lough Neagh and other rivers and lakes that they settled down ; and on coastal sites, near the river mouths that the salmon seek, we find, buried in sand, the relics of their " kitchen middens." In places such as the caves at Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, fisherfolk and shell-gatherers continued to cling to their old life century after century, and there can be little doubt, as anthropological research is beginning to show, that the racial characters of these original Irishmen survive in many a coastal area to this day. Readers are referred to papers by Professor T. Walmsley and J. M. Mogey in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology*. The results of a wider survey conducted by the Harvard University Mission to Ireland are awaited.

By low watersheds and lakes the fisherfolk seem to have found their way to the Barrow, to the Shannon and the teeming Corrib of Galway, so that the four provinces of Ireland have a substratum of the oldest stocks in the population. It is tempting to think of the Irish curraghs (Chapter 16) as a relic of this culture: they were covered with hide until recently, and it is noteworthy that even in Lough Neagh, where [396] the curragh has not been recorded in historic times, the fishermen speak of giving their boats a new "hide" when they repair them. Wooden foot traps for catching deer (the so-called otter-traps) which have been found in the bogs and which are figured on some of the Celtic crosses, are presumably

172

another heritage of the Mesolithic. Research will probably show that many details of material culture as well as a substantial element in the racial composition of the Irish people derive from the Mesolithic background, which has been termed " the main vital period in the setting out of the human map of Europe."

Left to themselves, however, it is unlikely that these fisherfolk, specialized as they were in the arts and crafts of food-gathering, would have advanced to the full status of civilisation. If our eyes were fixed on Ireland alone we should be unable to account for the origin of Irish agriculture and stock-raising, for the crops and animals that came to be used are not found in the native flora and fauna. It was from distant western Asia, by way of the seas and islands of the Mediterranean and the western peninsulas of Europe that the new ideas found their way to Ireland. And although the food-gatherers and fisherfolk had blazed the trail, it was a revolution in food production that now brought with it the elements of true civilisation. To it the term Neolithic (new stone) Revolution is applied.

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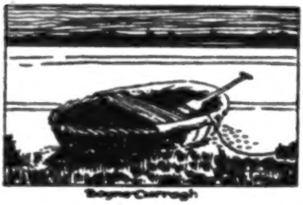

Boyne Curragh

Fig. 4.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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CHAPTER IV.

THE WORK OF MAN: CROPS AND ANIMALS.

172 It was probably a century or two before 2000 B.C. that the first farmers reached the Irish shores and began, however slowly, the moulding of the landscape with their tools of cultivation and their hungry animals. They brought with them not only crops and beasts from the sunny south, but new and strange gods endowed with magic powers. It has been conjectured that many of the old food-gatherers were held in subjection and forced to pay tribute in fish to the new masters. Certainly great salmon rivers like the Bann continued to be well settled, and the present eel-weir at Toome, with its wattled lanes, probably had a not very different forerunner on the same site in prehistoric days. Excavation has shown that the tanged flint flakes, of which hundreds of thousands are found along the Bann, were employed as the prongs of fish spears, and the hearths where the catches were smoked and dried have been unearthed.

Two innovations in such excavated sites betray the influence of our newcomers: they are the use of the polished stone axe and the manufacture of pottery. It is the former that gives its name to the New Stone (Neolithic) Age, while the use of pottery is the hallmark of a certain stage of culture and domestic industry. It has been suggested that the art of shaping stone tools by grinding and polishing arose, in the sandy soils of south-western Asia, through observing the wear

[p.29]

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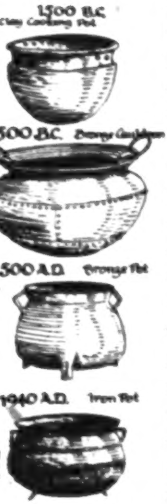
9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

172

on stones used as hoes for cultivation. We have direct evidence that some form of agriculture was practised at this time in Ireland, about forty centuries ago, and it is here that the foundations of Ireland's peasant culture must be sought. Some scholars have argued that a simple wooden plough reached Atlantic Europe not long afterwards from the Mediterranean, but the digging stick was probably the main cultivating tool: the digging tradition has remained all-powerful in Ireland, and even to-day the narrow Irish spade or loy (Chapter 13) is little more than an iron-shod digging stick.


1500 B.C.
Clay Cooking Pot
500 B.C.
Bronze Cauldron
1500 A.D.
Bronze Pot
1940 A.D.
Iron Pot

B151

Fig 5
Fashions in Pots.

Communal tombs of great stones built by these bringers of civilisation—the giants' graves of the countryfolk and the megalithic monuments of the archæologists—tell us a great deal, from their distribution and their contents, of the areas occupied and the beliefs held by the first Irish farmers. Glacial sands and limestone exposures attracted them on account of their easily-worked soils and natural clearings, while the thin soils and therefore light forest-cover of the hill-slopes and plateaux drew them by stages into all the scattered mountains from Wicklow to Kerry and from Antrim to Donegal. The discovery of grains of wheat and of saddle-querns for grinding corn, as well as countless sherds of hand-made pottery, show that they were settled farmers: their large round-bottomed pots, often provided with holes or lugs for suspension over the fire, are plausible forerunners of the common iron "pots" which are indispensible in every farm and cottage to-day. It should be borne in mind that the sub-boreal period (Chapter 3), from which this culture dates, was a time of warm dry climate, so that settlement and cultivation of wheat and probably barley were possible at elevations where they would now be difficult if not impracticable.

Bone-finds tell us that the Irishman's oldest animals were the pig and the ox. By analogy with other parts of northern Europe we should expect the earlier folk of the Mesolithic to have possessed the dog, though there is no clear proof of this. The horse, the goat and the sheep were perhaps

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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introduced in the Bronze Age, while the ass, which one might suppose to be long-established, was in fact hardly known before the 19th century. The wolf was the worst enemy of man's domestic animals: it was not finally exterminated until the end of the 18th century. Neither the Giant Deer nor the wild boar can be proved to have survived so long as to be contemporaneous with man. But there was a rich native fauna which could be hunted for food to supplement the products of crops and livestock. The red deer is still with us and was known in a wild state in the west of Ireland down to a century ago. Charcoal examined from the remains of domestic and ritual fires corroborates the evidence of pollen-analysis as to the forest cover of prehistoric Ireland. The common trees were oak, willow, birch and hazel, with ash, elm, alder and pine less widely distributed.

The beliefs and ritual practices of the megalith-builders were closely bound up with ideas of magic and fertility: the great stone monuments themselves, still standing after 4,000 years, seem to symbolize man's faith in a future life and were the outcome of the revolution of thought which accompanied food-production. No visitor can fail to be deeply moved by the splendour of the great chamber at New Grange on the Boyne, or by the mystery of the windy cairn on Knocknarea above Sligo. The two main entrances used by the megalith builders were the Boyne Valley and Carlingford Lough (whence archæologists speak of the Boyne and Carlingford cultures). These cultures show many interesting differences and no doubt contributed to the enduring distinction between North and South in matters of material folk-culture.

[184]

New crops and animals continued to reach Ireland during the 1,500 years of the Bronze Age (1800-300 B.C.), when the islanders engaged in active trade, exporting the gold of the Wicklows in the form of dress-ornaments and elaborating their tools and implements of bronze, using native copper and imported tin. Archæologists and philologists cannot yet agree as to the period when the Celtic language was introduced to Ireland, nor can the Pictish tongue be identified with any clearly recognized culture. All are agreed, however, that

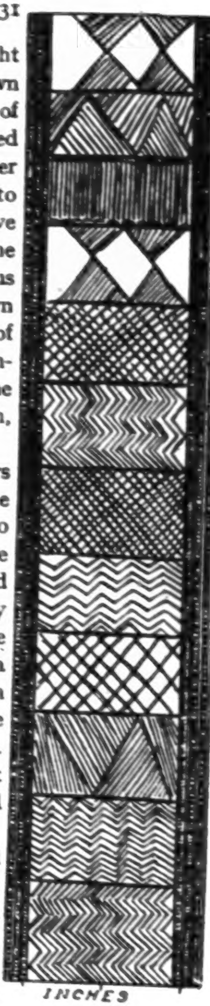

Fig. 6.
Ornament on bronze age pottery vessel from Co. Tyrone, date c. 700 B.C.

172 the Celtic tongue was imported by warlike overlords or "planters" somewhere within the limits of the Bronze Age, and that it was accompanied by the infiltration of ideas and customs that have their ultimate origin in central Europe and therefore represent a culture-pattern differing from the pre-existing "Atlantic" civilisation. But archæology teaches us that the older background was strong enough to survive and mould the new into characteristic Irish forms: even the virile curvilinear "La Tène" art style of the Early Iron Age, which entered Ireland by the north-eastern "bridgehead," was soon changed into new designs which the expert can at once recognize as "Irish" (Fig. 7). In peasant culture the continuity is incontrovertible.

But great changes were meanwhile taking place in the climate and natural landscape, and corresponding adaptations had to be made in Irish life. The onset of a cold stormy period not far from 500 B.C. forced man to move downhill and to concentrate on the drier lowlands, while on plateau and plain alike the old forests went down under layer after layer of wet bogland. When the veil is half lifted in the twilight of the Celtic Annals ten domesticated creatures are mentioned: kine, swine, horses, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, hens, geese and bees. To-day the only important additions would be the ass, the turkey and the duck. There are many signs that during the bad climate of sub-Atlantic times (say 500 B.C.-100 B.C.) cattle assumed the preponderating place in peasant economy which they have since maintained. It was their grazing, and the nibbling of the accompanying goats, which caused the great decline in the indigenous woodlands long before the forest remnants were destroyed by the English. The old custom of putting a goat with a herd of cows is perhaps a [231] survival of former practice, for the goats would have kept down tree-growth and so prepared pasture for the cattle.

But it must be insisted that the theoretical nomadism of the Celtic period finds little support in archæology: the 28,000 surviving earthworks known as "raths"—the sites of villages and cattle-enclosures—testify to the settled life of the dark

[Text continues top of p. 34--Analyst]

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172 -

TWO VIEWS OF LEGANANNY "DOLMEN",

CO. DOWN

[Facing p. 32]

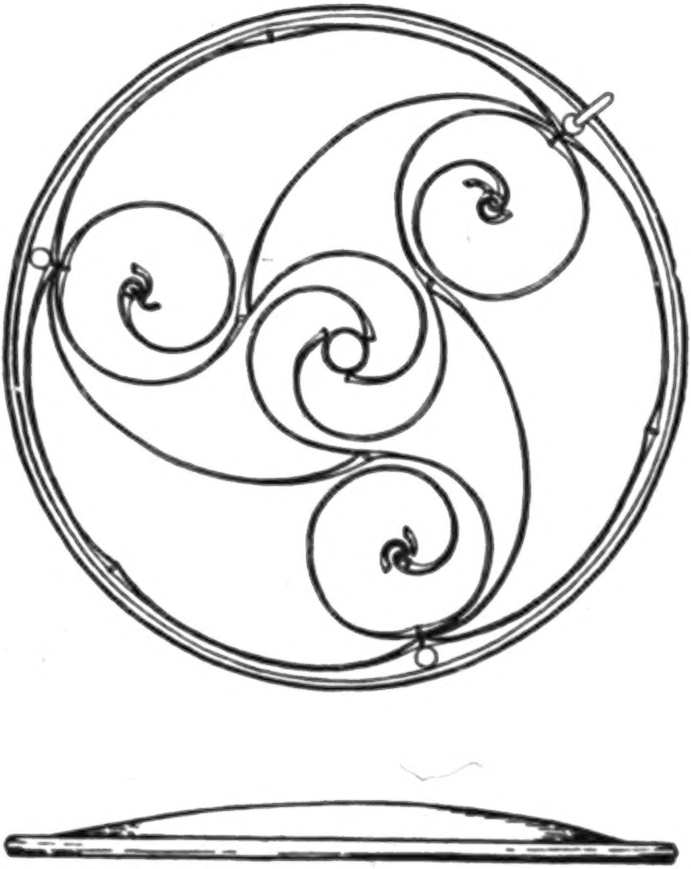

Fig. 7. Bronze disc of the Early Iron Age, from River Bann, date approx. 300 A.D.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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172 ages. It was probably in the late Bronze Age that oats, introduced perhaps from Spain, found their place as the leading corn-crop of Ireland and Highland Britain, better adapted than wheat to the damp conditions. The working of " bog iron-ore "—found in concretions in swampy places—is attested from the early Iron Age, and the traditions of the country smith have their origins in this period. Man's attack on the woodlands was accelerated with the possession of iron axes and adzes. We are not able to say how far Roman culture and novelties influenced the pattern of Irish life. Was poultry their contribution, and what of the cabbage, the only common Irish vegetable before the potato came in? Nor must we omit the contributions of the continental contacts maintained throughout the early Christian period, above all in improved architecture and the fine arts as well as in traditions of gardening and orchard-planting. Their influence can be seen, no doubt, in the relatively high standards of living and cultivation around places like Armagh. And it is to the early Christians and the Vikings that Ireland owes its earliest cities. From the Vikings, too, much was borrowed in matters of boat-building and metal-working. Since Norman times the contacts with Britain have steadily increased.

175
244 But we have yet to record the import of most significance for Irish peasant life—the introduction of the potato from the New World. The part that this crop has played in the social history of the island is a subject which calls for full investigation. While it gave bulky yields as food for man and beast, its cultivation brought about a decline in crops such as rye and beans. Thriving on a minimum of attention, its social influence has not been altogether for good: its effects on native habits might be compared with those of another New World crop, maize, in southern Europe and Africa. Ripening underground, potatoes had a great advantage over corn in the wet and windy climate of the west. Moreover the crop was less easy to pillage: "even the soldiers could not extirpate them." By the middle of the 17th century the newcomer was well established in Ireland.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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It undoubtedly helped the Irish peasants to survive through troubled times, enabled them to live on the hills and waste places to which they were driven, and also to multiply exceedingly in the decades before the great famines of the forties. 175 244

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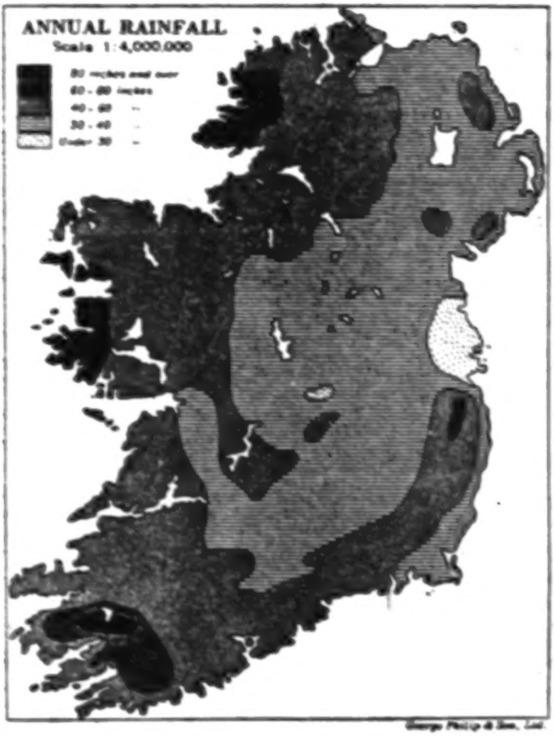
ANNUAL RAINFALL
Scale 1:4,000,000
80 inches and over
60 - 80 inches
40 - 60 "
30 - 40 "
Under 30 "

George Philip & Son, Ltd.

Fig. 8.

It will be well at this stage to say something of the climate and crops of present-day Ireland. The abundant rainfall, the prevailing cloud-cover, the high degree of atmospheric humidity, the strong winds, the cool summers and mild

132 winters—all these characteristics are related to the eastward moving stream of cyclones coming off the warm North Atlantic drift. Rain is heaviest wherever mountain masses place obstacles in the path of the moisture-bearing winds, and the peninsulas of Donegal, Connemara and Kerry have from 60 to 100 inches of rain each year (Fig. 8). By contrast the east coast gets about half this amount, while the low-lying tract between Dublin and Drogheda is favoured by a fall of under 30 ins. Everywhere the mildness and the damp encourage grasses and moisture-loving plants, but too often waterlogging has caused green pastures and woodlands to deteriorate into brown bogland. The prolonged autumns, another gift of the Atlantic, are important because they give man a sporting chance of saving his harvests: the heaviest rains are delayed until November and December. Similarly the relatively dry springs (March-May) are conducive to work in field and turf-bog at that season. (Chapter 15).

311 231 241 Reviewing the distribution of the chief crops and animals to-day, the following facts may be noted. Nearly one half the land devoted to crops, excluding hay, is occupied by oats and perhaps three-quarters of the yield is fed to livestock. Only in the wettest peninsulas of Connemara and Kerry does another crop (potatoes) occupy more land. It is estimated that the "consumption" of potatoes amounts to about ¾ ton per head of the population each year, but the greater part of this goes to pigs and other livestock. The greatest concentration of wheat production is in the comparatively sunny corner of Wexford, with secondary areas along the dry east coast in Cos. Dublin and Down. Recent years have witnessed an increase in wheat growing but there is still far less than in the record years of a century ago. when wheat was being exported to England. Barley, which is more intolerant of damp than wheat, is found on the well-drained soils of Co. Louth but particularly of Wexford and the sheltered valleys of the Nore, Suir and Barrow. It has declined less than wheat (273) because of the demand of the breweries and distilleries, but the drop in the illicit making of poteen has reduced its production in many a secluded spot along the west coast.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Flax is virtually confined to Northern Ireland, where 248
the bulk of it is produced on the rich soils of the Bann and 244
the Main. Turnips and mangels are pretty widely distributed
but sugar-beet is mainly grown in the valley of the Barrow.

In recent years about 60 % of the surface of Ireland has 311
been devoted to stock-raising, and when it is remembered 231
that a large proportion of the corn and root crops also goes to feed stock it will be seen that the pastoral industries predominate. Dairy cows, an essential part of the equipment of the peasant farm, are widely distributed, but in the commercial production of butter there is a strong concentration around the foci of Cork and Limerick, where co-operative creameries are favoured by the relative ease of transport, for example in the fertile "Golden Vale." These dairying regions also stand out as beef-producing areas, for Irish cattle are dual purpose animals bred for meat as well as milk. But the best fattening lands run round the northern and eastern sides of the Central Plain, and County Meath is justly famed in this connexion.

The dry limestone pastures of east Galway and hilly tracts such as the Wicklows and the Sperrins are outstanding as areas of sheep-rearing, and surprising numbers are kept on the slopes of the western mountains, the wool going to make the homespuns of the Gaeltacht. Pig-breeding is heaviest in the south-west, where the dairying industry supplies skimmed milk. As a domestic animal attached to the small farms, the
pig is by no means so typically Irish as is often assumed. [178]
But one often comes across empty pigsties, some of them of
archaic construction (Chapter 9) which testify to their
importance in the past: one minor factor in the decline is the [273]
fact that in the days of active poteen-making pigs were conveniently fed on the waste products.

On the other hand poultry of all kinds have maintained 235
and even increased their popularity. The old breed of hen still favoured in the west is a small black bird, active, intelligent and extremely domesticated. The potato has encouraged the keeping of poultry, and Arthur Young

9. Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

235 considered that the abundance of wild white clover, on the seeds of which chickens and young turkeys feed, was another contributory factor. Of the goat it can be said that it is often
231 the poor man's milk supply and supplements the cow on many small farms just as the ass replaces or supplements the horse. But the ass is in fact quite rare in many parts of the country, for example in Donegal, and is regarded with contempt, whereas the horse, as befits its important role since prehistoric times, is held in high regard and is kept by small farmers often as much for the sake of prestige as for its use. " If they have three acres," says a Government Report of last century, " they think they must have a horse." The strength and speed of the Irish race horse have been attributed to the bone-building qualities of limestone pastures: the great breeding and training ground is the morainic waste known as the Curragh of Kildare, but throughout the country there are many districts where, for geographical or historical reasons, horses of quality are bred for export and for the delight of the crowds at local race-meetings. Readers are referred to
[113] Dr. Dudley Stamp's *Agricultural Atlas of Ireland* (1931) for further information on agricultural distributions.

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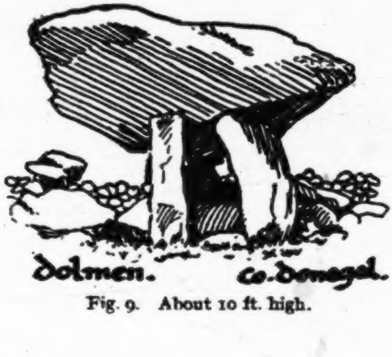

Fig. 9. About 10 ft. high.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER V.

WOODLANDS, FIELDS, FENCES AND GATES.

We have seen that the Irish landscape, in ancient times very well wooded, is now one of the most treeless in Europe, and we have shown how changes of climate as well as the depredations of livestock made great inroads into the forests. In later centuries many woodlands were destroyed by the English for strategic reasons, while the demands of ship-builders, of charcoal burners, tanners and stave-makers reduced the oakwoods to insignificant proportions. Poor scrub growth was in many areas all that was left. " An oak, an ash, or an elm," wrote Arthur Young of Mitchelstown in Co. Cork, " is almost as great a rarity as an olive, an orange or a mulberry." Ash remains the commonest tree, especially on the limestone of the Central Plain, despite the fondness of cattle for its leaves. We know that its valuable wood was used from the Bronze Age for handles and spear-shafts, and in the Pale it was insisted that " every husbandman having a plough shall set by the year twelve ashes in the ditches and closes of his farm." In the words of Evelyn : " It serves the soldier, the carpenter, the wheelwright, cartwright, cooper, turner and thatcher . . . from the pike, spear and bow to the plough." 137

Acorns and hazel nuts were often used as a source of food before the coming of the potato, and almost every tree had its particular uses in a society living on its own resources and [262]

[p. 39]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

137 bound by innumerable ties to a countryside richer and fuller
[262] than that of to-day. Thus birch, rowan, hazel, thorn, sally
and holly all had their special purposes, and yew was in great
demand for croziers and shrines. So we might go on down to
the humblest lichen (for crottle dye) and the seaweed (Chapter
16). Bog timber, oak and "fir," had many uses—for
furniture and implements, for roofs, gates, slide-cars and boat-timber as well as for fir ropes and lighting "splits." Super-stitious customs are associated with several of the native trees,
especially the rowan, the ash, hazel and whitethorn (Chap. 18).

Sycamore and beech, neither of them native to Ireland,
have been extensively planted in recent centuries and grow
so well that many have assumed them to be indigenous.
The beech loves the well-drained moraines, while the sycamore,
one of the few trees which will stand up to the full force of
[351] the salt-laden winds, is planted in coastal districts for the
313 shelter it provides: behind its dense summer foliage many a
137 low cabin lies hidden. Its white easily-worked timber is
sought by the wood-turner. Formerly the beetling engines
of the linen country made a demand for beech and sycamore—
the former for the beaters and the latter for the great beam.
On steep hillsides which man has been unable to utilize one
may still see patches of what may be regarded as wild scrub,
a tangle of hazel, ash, black and white thorn, or birch, rowan
and alder; but apart from the high-walled demesnes where
giant trees are allowed to grow old and rot, the Irish landscape
137 is singularly bare of timber. Visitors from England will
notice the poor development of hedgerow trees except for the
ash of Co. Meath. This must be attributed largely to the fact
that hedge trees have to grow in raised banks or "ditches,"
as they are called. Hedges and trees are very rarely planted
on the level, for the ditch-tradition is older than the hedge.
To quote Young once more: "I never saw a single capital
tree growing on these banks." But there is some compen-sation, in autumn, in the wealth of blackberries which they
produce (Fig. 10).

137 Travellers of the early 19th century constantly refer to
311 landscapes without a single tree or shrub or any trace of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

hedgerows. It is hard to realize that the close-set pattern of hedged or walled fields which now distinguishes so much of the countryside is for the most part only a century or so old. In many cases it can be shown that the fields and fences were laid out within the last hundred years, following the break-up of the rundale village system and the re-distribution of the land (Chapter 6). In the eastern lowlands, where English influence has long been at work, the field pattern and hedgerows are no doubt much older, but in general the small cultivated patches were separated by mere balks or waste strips, varying from one to ten feet in width. Stones from the fields, hand-picked or removed with crow-bar and slipe (Chapter 12) were dumped on the balks or, more frequently, piled into "cairns" in the middle of the fields. Such stone-heaps are often found accompanying prehistoric field-systems, for example in Jutland.

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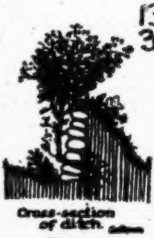
Cross-section of ditch.

[177]

Fig. 10.

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Stone walls or high earthen fences surrounded the house-clusters and enclosed each group of open fields, separating them from the common grazing land which lay outside and stretched away to the "head-ditch" on the mountain. As the rundale holdings gave way to individual farms the land was re-divided, the old ditches planted with whitethorn and new ditches, also set with thorn, were constructed—a process which was being actively carried out during the first half of the 19th century. One result of the scattering of the farms was the appearance of the long strip or "ladder farms," the cross hedges of the strip resembling the rungs of a ladder.

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The oldest fences, then, are the protective banks around farms which occupy old village sites—a survival no doubt of the rings around the ancient raths—and the march-dykes or divisions between townlands. The varied vegetation on these older banks betrays them just as it does the pre-enclosure hedgerows in England: their massive tumbled ruins are overgrown with whins, blackthorn, sally, ash and bramble. There are, however, still older forgotten divisions on the hillsides dating from various prehistoric periods; some have

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been discovered under many feet of peat. Several types can be recognized, for example those with upright stones at intervals, which are sometimes left as "standing stones" after the intervening walls have been removed. Old field fences at Cush, Co. Limerick, claimed to be contemporary with raths of the late Bronze Age and "essentially similar to those built by an Irish farmer of to-day" have been described by Professor O'Riordain. This appears to be a striking example of continuity, for the fences are closely followed by existing field-boundaries. Since they lie some 800 ft. above sea-level they do not invalidate the general picture I shall draw in the following chapter, but it is clear that much more work on the lines followed at Cush is required.

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[231]
Hedges of whins (that is, gorse or furze) about the farmstead are much prized not only for the shelter they afford to stock—they are dense and do not drip—but because they form an admirable clothes line on washing day and a ready source of kindling wood. Formerly the young whin shoots were crushed and fed to horses. The heavy wooden maul and stone block used in the process may still be seen occasionally. It would require years of enquiry and observation to describe and classify the types of sod ("scraw") earth and stone fences which now parcel out the Irish soil into its patchwork of small fields. One may easily recognize the sod ditches of the rich grazing lands of Meath, with their tall thorn hedges and ash trees giving shelter to the cattle, the well-built dry-stone walls of the granite mountain slopes which vainly seek to stop the black-faced sheep, and the loose lace-like walls precariously constructed out of rough boulders in the morainic hills.

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In the wind-swept mountains and along the coasts the ditches are hedgeless, carrying only a tangle of heather or whins and an occasional stunted tree, but throughout the lowlands the prevailing type of fence is a stone-faced bank of sods, in the side of which quick-thorn is planted (Fig. 10). These are cut back ruthlessly at longish intervals and are never pleached in the English way, so that the hedge is full of gaps. Occasion-

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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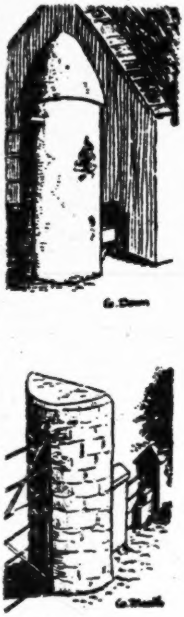
ally one comes across very wide ditches of this type with a 351
double hedge and paths or even cart-tracks in between, for 311
example in Co. Limerick. In Rathlin Island the only hedge 137
material that seems to escape the ravages of goats is the balsam poplar. Another plant of New World origin, born in Scotland of South American parents, is the Fuchsia, which runs riot along the coasts. Basket willows and wild "black sallies" for creels are sometimes grown—the latter has the advantage that it is not cropped by cattle.

The scarcity of good oak timber in a country once famed 351
for its oaks—notice the frequency of the element "derry" 417
in townland names—goes far to explain the prevalence of iron field-gates, which are hung on stout pillars of built stone. The newcomer to Ireland cannot fail to be struck by the massive gateposts along the roadsides and about the farm premises. In many districts they are whitewashed annually, and since they often assume proportions out of all relation to their function they are unnaturally conspicuous in a landscape bare of heavy timber. In parts of Ulster, for instance, they are such a characteristic feature of the countryside that it is difficult to imagine it without their cheering twinned greeting. Yet most of them must have been erected within the last century or so: writers of Irish travels before that time frequently comment on the absence of gates, for which in fact there was very limited need so long as the rundale system of farming persisted (Chapter 6). In the small village-communities of the west where the old scheme still prevails the gaps in the fences that surround the open field are closed with jagged root-stumps dragged from the bogs, or with a few thorn bushes. Sampson, writing of Co. Derry in 1814, states that gates were almost unknown except near towns, and that a common substitute was a hay-rope strung with thorns—an interesting rustic forerunner of the hated barbed wire.



Gate pillars and stiles

Fig. 11.

It might appear from the association of built piers with landlords' residences in Donegal that settlers introduced them to Ireland, but I am far from convinced that this is the

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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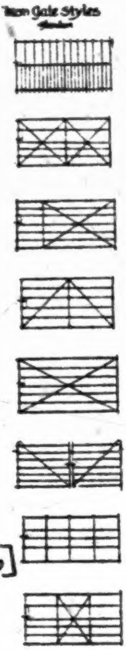
explanation. It is true that they occur in Anglesea and in parts of the Scottish lowlands, but in both cases they are likely to be due to Irish influence. It seems to me more probable that an indigenous custom was taken up and diffused by improving landlords. I like to think of the Irish rath defended and glorified by two white stone pillars at the entrance, though I confess that this finds no support in reports of archæological excavations. The only dated piers I know bear the date 1839, but there is an eight-foot pair in Inishowen which, tradition says, had already lost their gates in 1709. The variety of styles and the superstitious beliefs connected with the pillars do strongly suggest that their origin is to be sought far back.

I imagine they were used, before the general adoption of fences, to shut off the farmyard from the surrounding open field. Mr. T. G. F. Paterson tells me that in Co. Armagh the gateposts are sometimes referred to as "husband and wife." The most popular shape is cylindrical (Fig. 11), and the average dimensions about three feet in diameter and six feet high. Pretentious specimens may be as high as ten feet. The top is generally finished in a low cone but varies considerably from one district to another: in some parts they are flat-topped "so that the fairies can dance on them." In Co. Meath the usual shape is semi-circular and may have originated in the common practice of building the pillars against a wall at the entrance to the farmyard. In some counties they are square, with a pyramidical roof or a coping of large stones.

The gates, whether of iron or wood fitted with iron straps, are generally hung in an old-fashioned way: they pivot in a stone socket or "spud-stone," while the top of the heel turns in a perforated stone, nowadays replaced by an iron eye. The gates are not seldom made by the smith, who fashions them out of worn wheel hoops, for instance; and this helps to explain the pleasing absence of standardisation. Fastenings, too, are of many different kinds. Only in a few wooded areas are home-made wooden gates popular: they are light



[326]

Fig. 12.

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constructions of pegged branches, interwoven it may be with 351
willow or hazel and turning in hoops of wire or cord on a 417
wooden post. But as often as not, even where there are built gate-pillars, the gap is closed with an old cart or a few thorn bushes. The Irishman does not take the same pride as the English farmer in having a well-hung gate. It would appear that more importance is attached to the gateposts than to the gate!

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER VI.

VILLAGE AND BOOLEY.

361 Throughout the Irish countryside the farmhouses and cottages lie scattered as though casually spilt over the surface, forming an even film of population everywhere except in the mountains and bogs. Among students of rural settlement this country is rightly taken as one of the best European examples of the dispersed type of habitation. We very rarely see, except in a few exotic " plantations " which languish here and there, large agricultural villages of the English or European pattern, with their tree-shaded greens, their shops, churches and inns. A cluster of more than a dozen houses is almost sure to be the result of industrial influence—the erection of a mill or factory. Such a scheme of scattered dwellings, each set among its own fields, seems appropriate to a region where there are no inducements such as the needs of defence or the lack of water to encourage agglomeration, and where pastoral interests predominate, the animals needing constant attention.

361
174 But if we look more carefully at the Irish scene, and if we turn back to the records of history and prehistory, we shall find proof that the completely isolated farms are a fairly modern feature in most parts, and that house-clusters formerly predominated. Here and there, especially in the west, we see little " clusters " " onsets " or " clachans " of peasant houses, a dozen or so together, which preserve something of the character of the old villages we shall try to describe in this chapter. Over a wider area we find smaller clusters, three or

[p. 47]

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361 174 four houses together, which can almost invariably be shown to have once been larger: even these tiny groupings are referred to as "towns," and the use of this word suggests that such clusters were once the nuclei of the "townlands." It is because of this association with the vital townland unit, and because many rural customs find their explanation in past conditions, that I have thought it worth while to attempt a reconstruction of the chief features of these old communities. This is based largely on records and on surviving examples which I have studied in Co. Donegal and Co. Antrim. Allowance must be made for differences between one region and another, but I believe the following description to be applicable to most parts of Ireland, though the decay of the village-system began earlier in some areas than in others.

Travellers a century or so ago tell us that villages with 50 or 60 houses were not uncommon. In 1802 Donegal is said to have had about 500 villages, with an average perhaps of 20 or 30 families to each, but they were "dispersing daily into separate habitations and holdings" (Figs. 13 & 14). One uses the term village for want of a better word, for such clusters lack many of the well-known features of the English village. They were essentially communities of related families bound together in "friendship"—the word "friend" means a blood-relation in Ireland—with one or two surnames predominating in each group. This fact is still true of townland populations even though the holdings are scattered, and it [551] helps to explain the prevalence of nicknames in rural Ireland, and, for the same reason, in Wales and Scotland. The houses were clustered without plan or order (and never strung together end-to-end) generally in some sheltered hollow in the richest part of the townland, though they might be disposed along a road with some semblance of regularity. Shelter is always the first consideration. I have been told in Donegal that house sites were selected by the simple process of throwing up a hat on a windy day and letting the wind decide by noting its resting place.

174 491 361 Made roads were almost unknown in hilly districts—there was "no wheel car" among a population of 8,000 in one

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 50--ANALYST]

p. 49

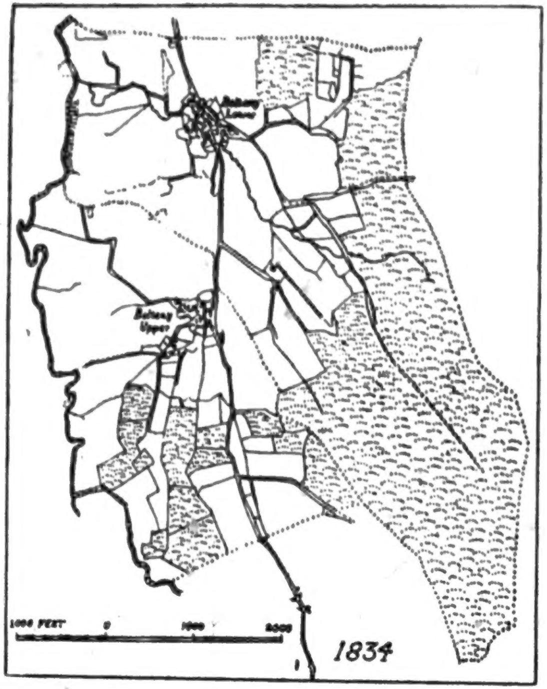
Baltany Lower
Baltany Upper
1000 FEET 0 1000 2000
1834

Fig. 13. Two Donegal townlands in 1834; showing village clusters.

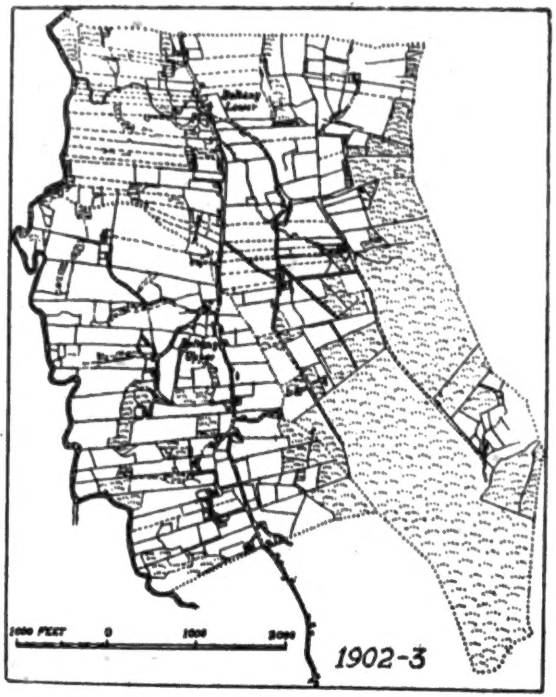
Baltany Lower
Baltany Upper
1000 FEET 0 1000 2000
1902-3

Fig. 14. The same, showing scattered dwellings and separate holdings (Einzelhöfe) in 1902/3.

Based on the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Minister for Finance of Ireland.

361

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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174 [491] 361 Donegal parish in 1837—and all the carrying depended upon slide cars and creels (Chapter 12). The village had neither shop nor inn, and required little besides salt and iron from the market town. These self-sufficing communities were held together by blood ties and by the exchange of services under the Irish open-field or "rundale" system of cultivation. Around the house-clusters were small walled gardens and haggards, but the arable land was an unenclosed open field in which each holder had his scattered patches, averaging perhaps a quarter of an acre in area. 423 There are cases on record where 29 partnership-peasants shared 422 plots of ground, where one man held 32 different patches, or again where 26 people had shares in a field of half an acre. In some districts it is known that the plots changed hands periodically. but no memory of this survives in the areas I am acquainted with. Live stock was sometimes subject to joint-ownership, with disastrous results where, for instance, three men claimed shares in a horse and could not agree as to the ownership of the fourth leg. But most of the stories that are told about rundale farming belong to the period of its decline.

174 221 361 Between the cultivated patches, which were dug with the spade or ploughed and devoted almost exclusively to potatoes and oats, ran waste strips or balks ("mearings," "bones" or "ribs") often left as much as three yards wide, apparently from a sort of pride, though they had their uses both as a source of hay and as tracks for the creel ponies when they could not enter the waterlogged plots. In the absence of fences all livestock had to be tethered, spancelled, herded, or sent to the mountain pastures during the crop season, which traditionally began on St. Patrick's Day (March 17th) and ended on the last day of October (Hallowe'en), when the animals were free to wander over the whole townland throughout the winter. "Any that had not their potatoes dug, or other crops off the ground, were much injured, neither could any one man venture to grow turnips, clover or other green crops . . . no one would attempt to manure better or otherwise improve his proportion, as his neighbour's cattle only would have the benefit." It is clear that the introduction of the

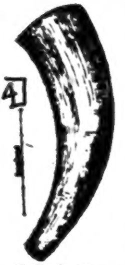
potato was one of the factors that led to the decline of rundale 174
agriculture, both because of its late harvest and because it 221
resulted in increased populations which brought disastrous 361
subdivision of the holdings. Under the " gavelkind " code of inheritance a man's property was divided equally among all his sons, so that the impossibly small fields came to be spoken [428]
of not as the standard " cow's grass," but as a " foot " and even a half-foot or " cleet."

Much has been written of the drawbacks of the rundale 174
system. It is so easy to condemn it—the " fights, trespasses, 621
confusion, disputes and assaults " to which it gave rise, the wretched poverty which it bred, the evil consequences of dwelling in packed house clusters—that it is well to recall the better side of the system before it fell into decline. A writer in 1853 has left his " recollections of nights of social converse, of aid in sickness, of sympathy in joy and sorrow, of combined operations of defence against bailiff or gauger which contrasted mournfully with the solitary grandeur of the new dwelling." Another apologist wrote : " the closer the rundale system is followed, the more the unwritten customs and regulations observed, the more do intelligent tenants regret a departure from them." Many of its better features, indeed, have survived the enclosure movement and the separation of farms ; we may cite co-operation in farm work and the social fire-side evenings or " caileys." " Gatherings " of many kinds, for work and pleasure, distinguished the rundale communities. Every village had its musician, piper or fiddler, who was often maimed in some way and supported himself by his skill. Folk songs, occupational airs and epic tales were kept alive in this way.

It was formerly the task of an appointed leader in a [622]
townland or group of townlands to see that customs were observed, to arrange the casting of lots in re-allotting strips, and so on. Probably we should see in the " king " not long ago recognized as leader in such communities as Rathlin and Tory a relic of this custom.

To understand the village-system in working order we 174
621
must see it as part of a wider pattern in which cattle-herding 221
231

174 played a dominant part, to which the claims of agriculture were
621 subordinated. It was customary for the young folk, and in
221 some cases the whole family, to leave the village as soon as the
281 crops were sown and migrate to summer pastures among the
hills. This custom is still widely followed in various mountain areas in Europe, for instance Switzerland and Spain, where it can be shown to be of great antiquity. To it the name "transhumance" is given, but we shall use the term "booleying," from "booley" (milking place), or summer hill dwelling. It is strange that scarcely any attention has been given or any importance attached to this aspect of the Irish past, despite its direct bearing on the social and cultural as well as the economic development of rural Ireland, on language and literature, music and the arts. From rare memories or survivals of the custom—it is still followed on Achill Island—and by analogy with transhumant societies overseas, we can envisage the part played by booleying in ancient Ireland, where its wide occurrence was facilitated by the presence of scattered mountain masses in all parts of the island (Chapter 2). We shall refer to some survivals below. The illustration (Fig. 15) shows a bullock's "horn" which used to
534 be blown not long ago at a farm in the Torr Head district of Co. Antrim, to summon people together. One is tempted to see in this custom a relic of the pastoral heritage. Traditions of hospitality are a common accompaniment of pastoral life: there is no need to stress the reputation of the country people in this connexion, but it is relevant to add that the lavish hospitality for which the landed aristocracy have been famous may well have been derived from Gaelic custom.



Bullock's Horn
[illegible]

Fig. 15.

Wherever it is found, this seasonal nomadism assumes a ritual significance, especially where, as in the old Ireland, cattle are its main concern. Thus the departure of the herds and their attendants in spring is accompanied by festivities and ceremonial; and the return to the homestead in autumn is the occasion for the rejoicings and reunions of Hallowe'en, when the youngsters play seasonal games among themselves and tricks upon their elders. We shall revert to this topic in chapter 17. Here we are concerned rather to describe the life

among the hill pastures. In spring, after a long winter, the 174
cows were often so weak that they had to be carried out of 621
the byre. When sufficiently restored they were driven, 221
together with the sheep and in some cases the poultry, to the 231
hills. In Donegal, according to an account written a century
ago, "the migration usually took place upon a fixed day,
the junior members of the family generally perform the
journey on the top of the household goods, and thus the chair
or two, the creels, and the iron pot, the piggin, and the various
selected *et cetera*—as if invested with a sort of dull locomotive
power—creep along the roads. The little churn is slung on one
side of the animal, into which the youngest child is often
thrust, its head being the only part visible."

Many townland names ending in "booley" or "boley" 221
assist us in our search for evidence, while in many places the 342
actual remains of the booleys can still be seen. They were 343
generally built of sods or turf, or of wicker-work faced with
sods, and roofed with branches and heather. Some were
circular and others square or rectangular, and the latter had 221
two opposite doors through which, it seems, the cows passed 234
in turn as they were milked inside, a tradition which is still
kept up in the two-doored cabins of Co. Kerry, where Dr.
Campbell has described how, in summer, the cows are milked
in the kitchen, entering at the front door and being driven
out by the back. The booleys were built in clusters, the
inhabitants of a particular "town" presumably living together.
Butter-making was the chief occupation, and the food of the
herders consisted largely of "whitemeats" that is milk
products such as curds and whey. Cheese seems to have been
of minor importance, though sheep were milked and it is
probable that, as is customary among the transhumants of
southern Europe, the milk was made into cheese. The butter [251]
appears to have been preserved—it was un-salted—by burying
it in wooden, skin, bark or cloth containers in the bog. This
"bog-butter" frequently turns up in turf-cutting operations:
it is white or yellowish in colour and smells like ripe old cheese.
A keg dug up in Co. Meath was found to contain over seven
stones of butter.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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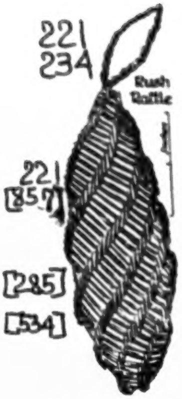

Fig. 16. Co. Mayo.

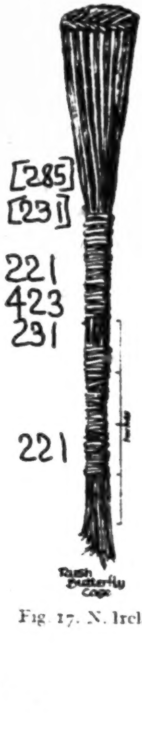

Fig. 17. N. Ireland.

The evening milking was often followed by dancing to the music of an itinerant piper, and there were many diversions for the cattle-tenders through the long summer days. Old tales and songs were kept alive among the hills where many of them had their origin. Spinning and knitting occupied the women, and the youngsters amused themselves by cutting and carving wooden objects and by making toys out of rushes—rattles (Fig. 16), cages for butterflies (Fig. 17), dainty rush baskets for gathering "fruogs" (bilberries) (Fig. 18) and ornamental whips and sticks of bound rushes. Little wicker cages were made for catching birds. Various instruments and whistles for calling together the animals were constructed, and there have been discovered deep in the bogs long horns which curiously resemble those still used by the Carpathian shepherds. I have read that in the Scottish Highlands that ancient ceremonial instrument, the bull-roarer (Fig. 113) played a part in the cattle herding. We shall refer to its survival in Ireland in Chapter 19. As in modern Norway, it might be said that "the time spent in the mountain pastures was the happiest time of the year. Every living creature wanted to go to the mountains."

Although this booleying, like the rundale village system which it accompanied and helps to explain, is now almost entirely a thing of the past, it has left many traces in the customs and traditions of the countryside. Hill pastures, now devoted mostly to sheep-rearing and visited only by the shepherd, are still held in common and reckoned in sums, lumps or collops, the unit of mountain grazing which fixes the relative grazing capacity of different kinds of stock. Thus a cow may be reckoned equal to four yearlings, five goats or sheep or say twenty geese. The decline of seasonal nomadism affected the balance of rural life and work and left a summer surplus of young folk who were free to emigrate or to engage in harvesting whether in the east of Ireland or later in Britain, while frequently the women became vagrants during the summer. In Ulster, where the incoming "planters" were bitterly opposed to the "creaghts," as the transhumants were called, the custom explains the ease with which, throughout the 17th century, the natives withdrew themselves to the 221 mountains, where they lived a life that some historians have mistaken for aboriginal nomadism.

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The booleying tradition, finally, throws light on many of the customs connected with cattle and sheep, and helps to explain the absence of the dairy in permanent dwellings which formerly had to serve as winter houses only, most of the dairy work being done in summer. It also helps us to attribute to custom rather than solely to laziness and neglect the Irish farmer's traditional indifference to the fate of his crops during the summer months. "Spring and harvest time," we quote a typical 19th century observer, "are the only periods at which the peasants exert themselves, and then they work very hard; for the rest of the year they are idle."

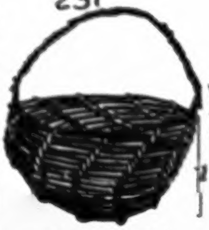

Fig. 18. Co. Antrim.

[285]
[415]

The old customs of tending ("herding") the cattle and tethering or spancelling them also derive from the rundale phase with its lack of field-divisions and fences. "Cattle, sheep, pigs and goats," wrote Arthur Young, "are all in bondage, their forelegs tied together with straw . . . . cocks, hens, turkeys and geese all have their legs in thraldom." Various devices for limiting the freedom of farm animals are still widely used: even the hen with her chickens around her will be seen tethered by the leg to a stone or iron weight. Where animals still run in common under the system of "sums" it is necessary to give them distinguishing marks. Apart from the well-known methods of branding or colouring [422] the sheep's wool it is the custom in parts of Ireland, as in Wales, to ear-mark sheep by cutting or notching the ear with proprietary shapes. In Clare Island the geese are "tokened" by having holes punched in their webbed feet. Incidentally [413] it is worth noticing that, so far as I am aware, the iron-tipped shepherd's crook is unknown in Ireland, a bent ash stick taking its place. "Gatherings" and co-operation are of course a feature of sheep-shearing and dipping. Sheep-pens [343] of dry stone construction are often associated with ancient settlements among the hills: they are of various shapes and would repay study.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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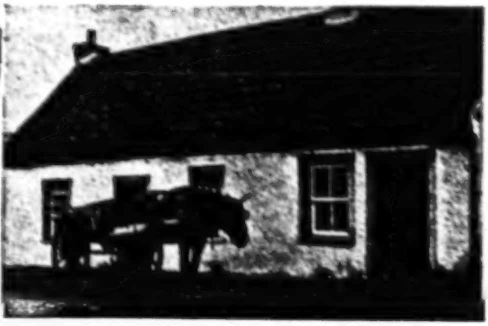
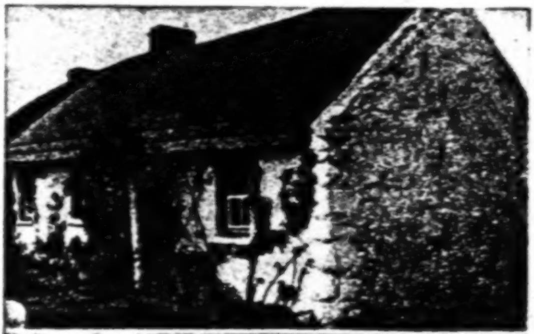
[493]



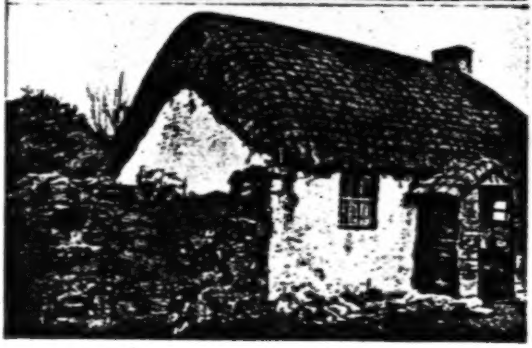
THATCHED
ROOF
SECURED WITH
PEGGED
FIR-ROPES

N. ANTRIM



SCOLLOP
THATCH
OF MARROM
GRASS

MAGILLIGAN
CO. DERRY



ROPED
THATCH
OF
RYE STRAW

ARTICLAVE,
CO. DERRY

[facing p. 57]

CHAPTER VII.

THE IRISH PEASANT HOUSE.

342 The Irish peasant house consists of a low single-storied rectangle, some 12 to 15 feet wide internally but of varying length, customarily thatched and whitewashed; but this generalised description embraces a surprising range of styles. So much abuse has been levelled at the Irish cabin that it is well to recall the opinion of a Swedish scientist who writes as follows:—" Lacking nearly every architectural consciousness and at the same time every kind of imported building material, the Irish peasant house never stands out in bold relief against its background but melts into it even as a tree or rock. Whenever the old building traditions are faithfully maintained its features are of a fine simplicity. The best Irish thatching gives the finest peasant roof in Europe."

342 362 511 The other side of the picture is the dirt and smells inseparable from the long habits of close association with livestock, so that within living memory, " cows and calves, men, women and children, horse and poultry were herded together in one apartment." Poverty and the rack-rent system have been blamed for this, but behind it lie facts of ethnology which are rooted in the remote past. Local authorities are striving to wipe away the stigma of the old order, and are spreading a " rash " of red-roofed cottages over the fair face of the country, but there is still a great mass of material for study.

[p. 57]

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342 It has often been asserted that the Irish lived, until a few centuries ago, in wattled circular huts. Archæology tells us, however, that well-built stone structures were used from the very dawn of civilisation: the dry walling of the megalith builders is of superb construction and the stone foundations of houses of the period, both round and rectangular in plan, have been unearthed. It seems probable that stone, timber, wattle, clay and sods were all employed from very early times and that Ireland shared the traditions of the "timber province" of northern Europe and the "stone province" of the Mediterranean. Although it is well-nigh impossible to discuss present house forms without reference to the past we shall confine ourselves to the last half-century in this necessarily brief review. But reference must be made to the lay-out of some old cabins which have been described, for it throws light on surviving customs and nomenclature. These were built on a slope at right-angles to the contours—more recent houses are placed along the slope—so that the top end was excavated into the hill-side and profited from the semi-subterranean warmth, while the lower end housed the animals, the slope allowing the refuse to drain away. The terms "top" and "bottom" gable are still applied to houses of the gable-chimney type.

This brings us to the fundamental division of present-day Irish cabins into gable-hearth and central-hearth types. Owing to the practice of extending gabled houses behind the chimney it is not always possible to say at a glance whether the presence of a chimney near the centre of the roof denotes a central-hearth house. And even when the hearth is situated against the gable it can sometimes be shown that it has been moved to that position within the last century or so. For our present purpose it is simpler to classify the cabins into gabled and hip-roofed types (Fig. 19). The former is universal in the north, but as one travels south one sees the tops of the gables rounding into a half-hip until, at the Boyne, the hipped style is established, though the gabled form is found side by side with it throughout the south. Some examples in the west have rounded corners, making them an elongated

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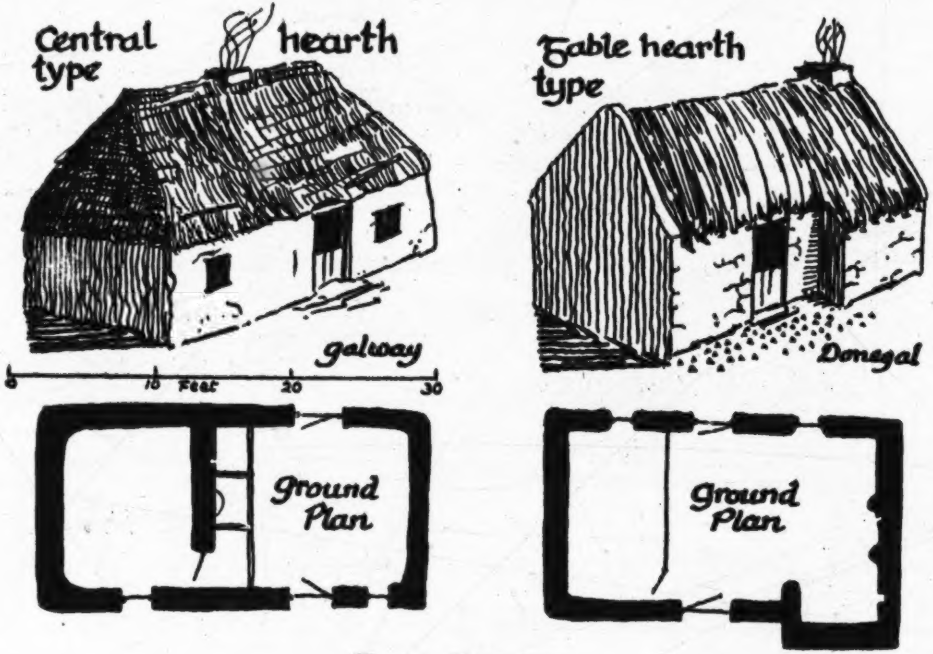
Central hearth type
galway
0
10 Feet
20
30
Ground Plan
Gable hearth type
Donegal
Ground Plan

Fig. 19. House types.

342

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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342 oval in plan: the problem of the origin of the hipped roof is discussed in Chapter 9. It should be realized that there are many transition types, and of course slated houses are rapidly replacing the old styles, but the division into upright gables and hipped roofs is fundamental. Dr. Campbell's pioneer work in this field has met with a hostile reception in some quarters:
[113] see for example Mr. Colm Ó Lochlainn's review in *The Irish Book Lover*, January, 1940.

Within these broad divisions there is endless variety of construction, internal lay-out and roofing technique. Of special interest is the projecting bed-wing, the "outshot" or "cailleach" (Fig. 19), which is attached to gabled houses throughout the north-west from Co. Derry to Co. Galway. It may be compared with the "half-neuk" beds of the Orkneys and Faroes, and has its parallels too in the wall-beds of the Hebridean black-houses. The device allows the large bed (6 ft. by 4) to take its traditional place at the fire-end of the house without unduly narrowing the all-important space around the hearth. The bed recess is cut off from the room by curtains or, formerly, by hanging straw mats.

342
231 Single-roomed kitchen byres, where the family occupies the top or hearth-end and cattle the other, are now a thing of the past, but a few examples have survived in their original state, with an open drain crossing the floor and emptying at the side of the door. The custom of taking the animals under the family roof was once prevalent over north-western Europe in regions of difficulty where access to the cattle in all weathers was a determining factor. Tenacious usage rather than poverty ensured its survival into recent times, where the mutual advantage of the custom is summed up in the phrases, "the cow keeps the house warm," and "warmth increases the yield of milk." Two other points should be borne in mind, its relation to the system of booleying described in Chapter 5, and the necessity in former times of protecting the precious animals from wild beasts.

342 As a rule the bottom or byre-end was later converted into a dairy, store or spare bedroom, but the principal bedroom,

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[777]

called simply "the room" or—in the Gaeltacht—the "west room," though not always at the west end, extends behind the chimney which helps to warm it. A wealth of customs and superstitions centres in the West Room; they have been described by Dr. Arensberg in his book, "The Irish Countryman." It is considered unlucky to build on to the other end of the house, that is the bottom gable. Similarly it is unlucky to widen a house. The "developed" Irish house thus consists of three compartments and is never more than a single room in width. The older houses are for the most part of stone, either dry-built or with mud laid as mortar. But mud-walled structures are common in areas where stone is not convenient: they by no means denote extreme poverty because from the absence of stones they are often situated in the richest alluvial valleys. A Dublin daily paper recently asked its readers, in a column headed "Believe it or not," to marvel at the fact that certain African tribes actually lived in houses built of mud! Here and there a few sod houses survive, and there is still standing in Co. Antrim a roomy dwelling occupied by a healthy and intelligent family, cut out of solid turf to the height of the eaves, the surrounding peat-bottom, now the farmland, having had several feet of turf removed from it. The stone and mud houses are almost invariably whitewashed both inside and out. Walls vary greatly in thickness but average from 20 to 30 inches.

A feature of many of these older houses is the two opposite doors at back and front, the latter always supplemented by a half-door which keeps animals and children in or out, forms an arm-rest for conversational interludes, and helps to regulate the fire draught. Back or front door could be used according to the wind, and this is the reason commonly advanced to explain the opposite doors. We have seen in the previous chapter, however, its relation to the pastoral tradition, and it should be added that parallels can be adduced from a wide province extending from southern Europe to Scandinavia. We may mention the feeding walk found in the old Welsh "long houses." As with many other parts of the house, superstition attaches to the use of the back door, for

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342 instance the stranger must not be allowed to leave the house that way lest he take the luck of the house with him. In the Aran Islands it was the custom to carry out the corpse through the back door. [764]

The deal door has not long since replaced, in remote spots, the wickerwork frame, lined with straw, or the hanging straw mat, and I have been told of houses where a creel offered the only protection. There may be only one small window, towards the hearth-end, for the open door provides light. [281] A dried sheepskin was a substitute for glass, and I have come across windows where a sheet of glass was sealed with clay without any frame. Where the hole was open, a handful of hay or a wicker shutter closed it at nights. These conditions help us to understand why the window or windows, even now, tend to be restricted to the side sheltered from the prevailing winds.

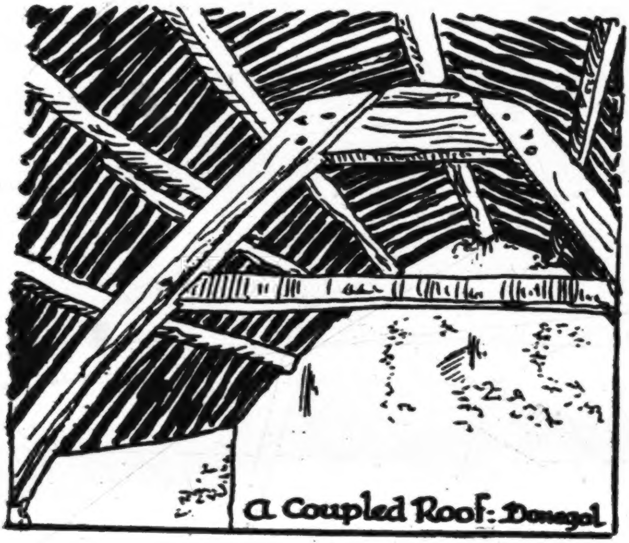

Fig. 20.

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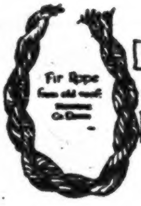
We now come to the roof with its timber framework and thatch. It generally consists of couples resting on the side-walls and joined together by tie-beams at the top; and houses are referred to not as measuring so many feet but as being two- three- or four-coupled. The rib-lengths, between the couples, are a kind of architectural unit.[1] In most old cottages the frame of the roof is of bog-fir, but its use has been superseded by imported "fir." There are many different methods of joining the couples, for example in Donegal they do not actually meet but have a short tie at the top which rounds the roof against the wind (Fig. 20). If the walls are of clay, sod or turf, the couples may be supported on internal beams placed upright against the side-walls, but the purlin method is generally adopted to avoid the thrust of the couple ends. Long beams run from gable to gable, and may be seen projecting outside to allow for the possible movement of the end-walls. This method of roofing allows of greater width than the coupled roof and is preserved, for example, in the old weavers' houses around Lough Neagh, where space was needed for the large looms. (Figs. 22c, 27 & 28.) 342

On the framework of couples or purlins lighter timber was placed at intervals and on these were laid at right angles rows of branches or laths, often made out of split bog timber. Where teasels were cultivated for the home woollen industry their dried stalks were employed for this purpose. Then came a layer of "scraws," peeled from a carefully selected spot where the grass is tough with a spade or flachter (Chapter 15) and placed on the roof in long overlapping strips with the matted roots inwards. The scraws were of standard sizes, for instance 12 ft. long by 2 ft. by 1½ inches thick. but they were shorter than this in the south, where the flachter was not known. The scraws were generally sewn to the roof timbers with loops of sugán or fir-rope (Fig. 21). The sod layer, while universal in old houses throughout the north, is not always found in the south. Professor O'Riordain has described old houses in Co. Limerick, for example, where the thatch is sown directly on to the battens.



[283]
[184]

Fig. 21.

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[1] *cf.* the fork-intervals or "bays" of the old English house.

Then comes the thatch itself, which, while customarily of straw—rye is considered the best—may consist of tough mountain grass, rushes, marram grass, flax, reeds, and not long ago, heather or even potato haulms. Old houses in the north-east sometimes have a thick layer of flax waste or "shows" under the thatch. With the many ways of shaping and securing the thatch it is not possible to deal at length. One of the oldest devices is the sugán or rope method (Fig. 22), common in the west and in coastal or exposed situations elsewhere. A network of ropes is secured to stone pegs at the eaves or weighted down with stones that may either hang loose or rest on the roof above the eaves. Where the gable end rises above the thatch the ropes run over the roof-ridge and are supplemented only by a single eave-rope or lath, but in Mayo the gable is stepped so that horizontal ropes may be carried through the angles and secured in the gable ends. Another coastal method, found for example in north Antrim and in Connemara, consists of horizontal bands or ropes of bog-fir, sally or heather, pegged into the thatch at intervals (Fig. 22). A common way of securing the thatch is to plaster the ridge and, in mud-walled houses, the strips above the gable-tops, with mud, or latterly with cement. In the latter case the thatch protects the mud walls by projecting over the ends (Fig. 22). Dwellings roofed in this way are known in Inishturk, off the Mayo coast, as "shaken houses," in contrast to the "stitched houses" of tied ropes. Finally there is the scollop or scobe thatch, secured by bent rods which are hidden (Fig. 23) except at the ridge and along the eaves, where they may be worked into lozenge patterns. The tools of a scollop thatcher are illustrated in Fig. 24. This method, it has been claimed, is due to English influence, but it would be instructive to compare its distribution with known culture borrowals. It occurs as far west as Kerry and even Connemara and is the usual method on the steep-roofed houses of Galway city. (*cf.* Pl. III.)

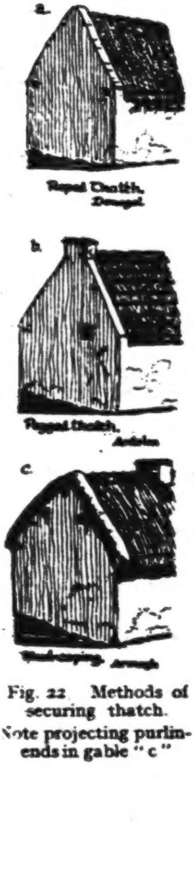

Fig. 22 Methods of securing thatch. Note projecting purlin-ends in gable "c"

Two protruding elements of the house remain to be mentioned—the porch and the chimney. Neither was common a century ago, and where they are present on an old house they

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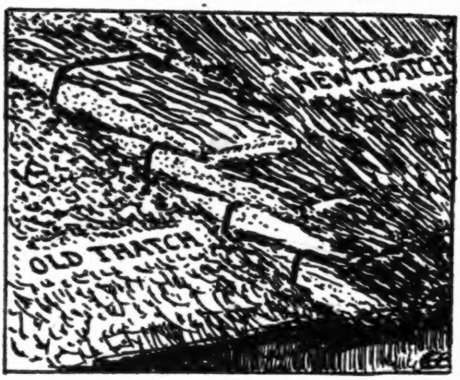
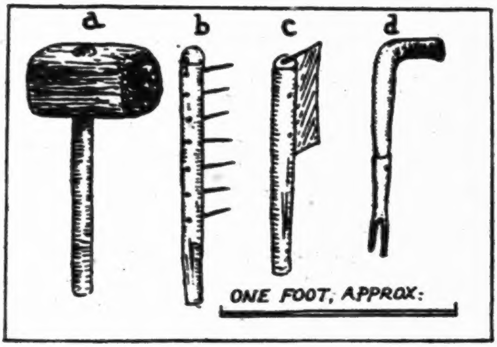

NEW THATCH
OLD THATCH

342

Fig. 23. Scollop thatch


a
b
c
d
ONE FOOT, APPROX:

[413]

Fig. 24. Tools of a scollop-thatcher.

[p. 65]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 can be shown or assumed to be additions. A wicker windbreak
of birch or hazel (called the wassock or corrag in Co. Antrim),
was occasionally erected at one side of the door. Here, too,
there was often a stone bench or "stile." The chimney
generally betrays its modernity by being built of brick, but
wooden or wattled chimneys, neatly thatched and bound with
sugán, are not uncommon, and there are a few chimneyless
dwellings still inhabited in the west. Old houses frequently
have no more than a few inches of chimney projecting, and it
is recorded that when efficient chimneys were built by improving
landlords they were promptly covered with a sod, " because
the smoke keeps them warm." It remains to be said that in
former days house-building, like so many tasks demanding
much labour, was a communal affair. " The custom on such
occasions "—the scene is Donegal a century ago—" is for the
person who has the work to be done to hire a fiddler, upon
[476] which all the neighbours joyously assemble and carry, in an
incredibly short time, the stones and timber upon their backs
[482] to the site, men, women and children alternately dancing
[535] and working while daylight lasts, when they adjourn to some
dwelling where they finish the night, often prolonging the
dance to dawn of day."

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE: FIRESIDE AND FOOD.

As we step inside an old Irish cottage, over a threshold of 352
stone slabs or a pattern of small cobble-stones, we tread on a 342
hard mud floor in which we may see, towards the hearth, the
" pot hole " where the large iron pot rests when it is lifted off
the fire. I have noticed similar holes in the mud floor, with
the remains of the round-bottomed pottery vessel inside, near
the excavated hearths of Irish houses nearly 40 centuries old.
In paved kitchens a block of wood set flush with the flags [354]
answers the same purpose or there may be an iron pot rest
(Fig. 25). The area surrounding the hearth is always paved,
and the fire itself, in the old style, is at floor level. We shall
be invited to take a seat at the fire, for this is the place of
honour given to strangers: the fireside is both the focus of 352
family life and the symbol of hospitality. The seat may be a [574]
stone slab built into the fireplace, so that the social tradition
is incorporated in the architecture of the hearth, or it may be a
roughly made but sturdy chair, bench or " creepie "
(Fig. 26). The low stool not only brings one near
fire-level, but keeps one's head out of the peat smoke
hanging in the open rafters, while its three legs find
firm footing on the uneven floor. Other low stools are
made of solid turf or wood—a section of a tree-trunk
—or again of coiled straw-rope, while chairs are often
made with seats of sugán or of rush. Comfortable high-
backed chairs fashioned out of straw in the manner of a

Fig. 25.

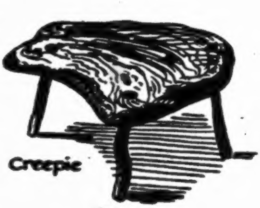

Fig. 26.

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352 bee-hive were common in some districts, but in parts of Mayo one rarely sees chairs of any kind. Step or ladder backed chairs with rush or straw seats are widespread : in the north-east chairs with wooden seats and upright-barred backs are [372] perhaps more usual. The turf fire is never allowed to go out : the glowing turves are heaped with ash at night and can be readily blown into a flame in the morning.

342 If the house has kept its brace and wattled chimney we shall be sitting under a canopy which tapers upwards to the smoke hole. The brace is a great beam extending from wall to wall, or resting at one end on a post some 5 feet out from the end-wall : between post and wall there may be a side partition or curtain-wall (Fig. 27) known in the Armagh-Meath area as the jamb-wall or the " hollan."[1] In some districts the front door is placed opposite this wall, but not, I fancy, in really old houses. In that case there may be a small window—the " spy-hole " " entry," or " jamb-window "—in the partition, allowing the sitter at the fireside to keep an eye on the open door. I have seen several houses in Co. Armagh where one has to stoop under the projecting brace to enter the house (Fig. 27). A further development is to hang a door on the brace-post, thus making a kind of internal porch or small hall. The jamb-wall is found from Co. Down to Co. Limerick but I have not seen it in the north-western province of the outshot.

342
352 The canopy is constructed of wattles or of sugán, plastered with mud and cow-dung and white-washed outside. Canvas or boards are recent substitutes. At the sides of the chimney, above the ends of the brace, are small lofts or storeplaces, and there may be a larger " half-loft " over the other end of the kitchen—a relic of the time when corn and hay were kept here for feeding the animals below. A usual feature, under the stone seat to one side of the fire, is the ash or rubbish pit, another survival from far prehistory ; and balancing it on the other side of the fire there may be a warm stone recess for the [231] sitting hen. At the back of the fire is a thick flag—the backstone—or a mass of clay forming the hob, but this is carefully built up of stones or bricks in eastern and southern

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[1] This word is also used in N. England and Scotland for the curtain-wall. In Lancashire it is termed the " speer."

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Armagh

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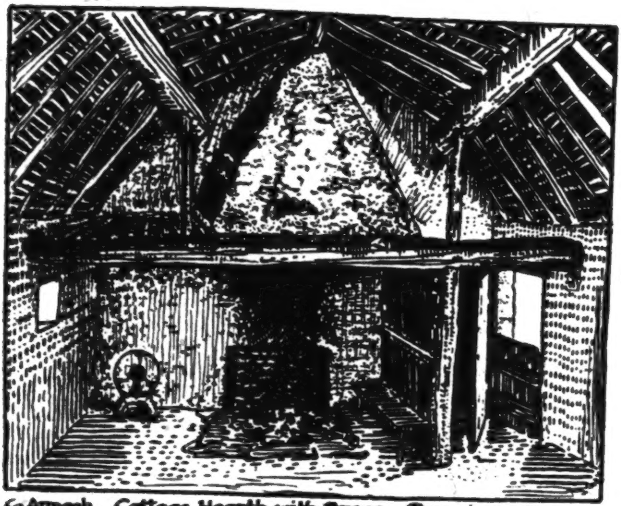
Co.Armagh. Cottage Hearth with Brace. Derryinver T.L.

Fig. 27. Note wheel-bellows.

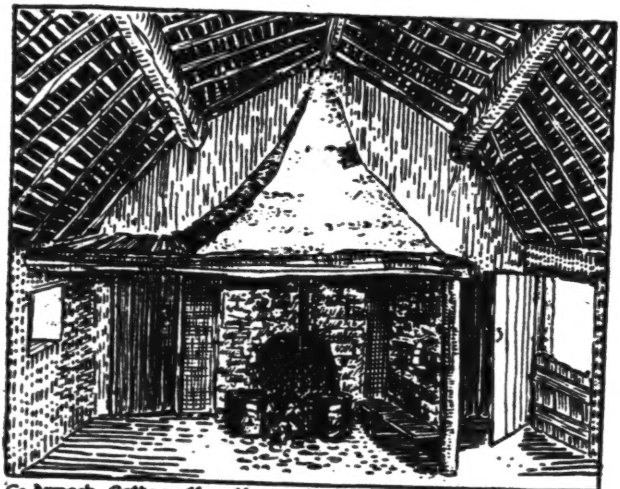
Co.Armagh. Cottage Hearth, Jambwall & window. Derrytrasna.

Fig. 28. Note " jamb-window."

[p. 69]

342 Ireland, which is the province of the wheel-bellows (Fig. 27) 352 a contrivance which produces a powerful draught under the fire. Another feature of the fireplace is the small keeping-holes (" boles ") in the wall, which may contain the clay pipes or the knitting : they are usually reserved for special purposes and seem to have their peculiar association with either male or female use. The alarm clock is often kept in one of these [805] recesses—on the south side, I have been told, because that is the side where the sun tells the time—but there are cabins where the rooster is the only time-keeper, his perch being the long pole, or, in the old days, the sugán, which crosses the cabin in front of the fire and which is used in the daytime for drying clothes.

251 Near the fire too is the wooden meal chest or " ark," 352 where the oatmeal is stored. One of the ancient customs, now [857] almost dead, is the " tramping " of the meal, the children being periodically placed in the ark, barefooted, to tread it down. Alternatively the meal was stored in a large hogshead immediately behind the chimney, in the " room," where it would be kept dry without taking up the valuable hearth space. Under the brace you may perhaps see a lump of bacon or a dried fish or two, and this is the place where the horse collar is hung in some districts. We shall return to the other fireside gear later in the chapter.

354 In some areas, especially in the north and north-west, that is the province of the gable hearth, the brace and canopy are rarely seen, their place being taken by a stone or brick chimney (Fig. 29). It seems probable that houses of the outshot type, at least, never had the brace, which would be difficult to erect owing to the recessed side-wall. There are 352 many problems which require study in this connexion. Where possible the bed, whether half-recessed in its cailleach or not, lies at one side of the fire : alternatively there may be a large settle—often convertible into a bed—against one of the side walls. This is generally a solid piece of furniture, and I have seen some very attractive examples of bog-oak.

The most noticeable article of furniture in the room is the dresser, which though generally of deal and lacking the fine

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Donegal

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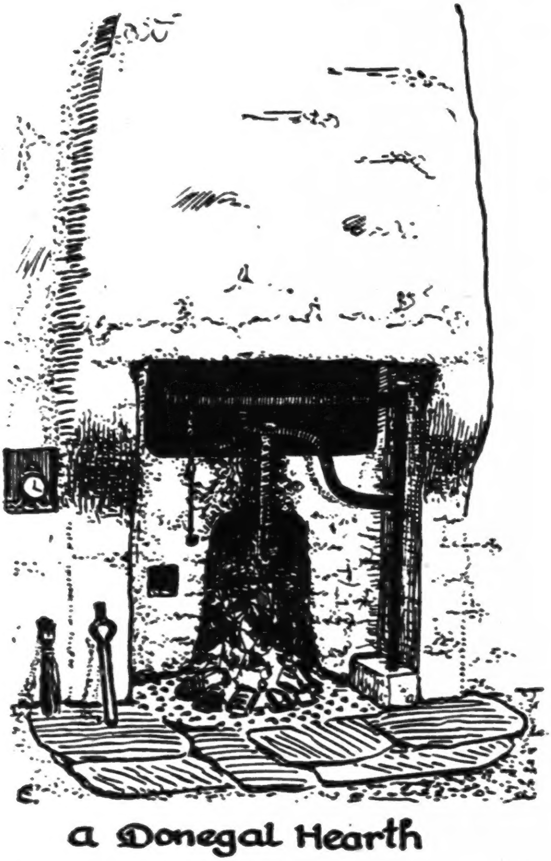
a Donegal Hearth

Fig. 29.—Note keeping-holes, besom, tongs, crane and pot-hanger (crook).

[p. 71]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

352 workmanship of the Welsh oak dressers, is an essential part of the kitchen and, like the keeping-holes mentioned above, has its prototype in the stone shelves of some of our oldest prehistoric dwellings. The dresser belongs, like so many of the other elements we are discussing, to the "Atlantic" province of European folk-culture. It accompanies the open hearth tradition as distinct from the "oven tradition" of central Europe, and may be thought of (compare the absence of the large table mentioned below) as providing storage while taking up a minimum of the valuable floor space in small single-roomed houses. The dresser has its fixed place in the layout of the kitchen, the position varying, however, according to the district, the type of house, disposition of the doors, and so on. In the outshot houses it stands against the side wall alongside the bed, whereas in the central-hearth type it lies
352 across the kitchen opposite the fire and helps to partition off
415 the end room. The bottom of the dresser is open. Here the hen-coops, of straw, wattle or wood, were sometimes kept, but one is more likely to see a collection of iron pots and the crocks, buckets or wooden stave-built vessels (piggins) for holding water or milk. The latter I have seen covered with roughly trimmed stone slabs (Fig. 68), a prehistoric device which has the advantage of coolness and gives protection from the cats. On the dresser are a few bits of "delph" and the tin mugs which have displaced the wooden noggins. Delph, as kitchen-ware is called, has not long since become general in remote parts. Of Mayo in the last century we read that "all their vessels were of wood, most of them cut out of solid timber." These included not only platters, spoons and ladles, but also methers or drinking cups of various sizes. Where the crockery tradition is of old standing, plates, jugs and long rows or nests of bowls "whammeled," that is tumbled on their sides, line the dresser shelves. Here, too, are the beetles of different shapes (Fig. 30) used for pounding or mashing the potatoes. The upright milk churn commonly finds its place alongside the dresser.

[412]

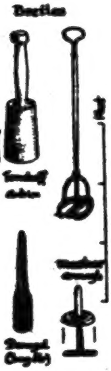

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Fig. 30.

One very rarely sees a table of any antiquity in an Irish kitchen: it is generally of deal and it is placed against one of

the side walls so that it is impossible to sit round it. The 352
table is not a centre of social activities and has nothing like
the same importance as in an English farmhouse. There are
crofters' dwellings in Donegal where no table is used; instead, [264]
at meal times, the shallow potato basket or skeehogue (Fig. 31)
is taken on the knees of the members of the family as they sit
in front of the fire, or an upturned creel may serve instead.
Very low oblong tables or trays cut from the solid were
formerly used and are occasionally dug up from the bogs.
They have holes by which they could be suspended from the
wall when not in use, and it may be for convenience of transport during the summer migrations. The potato basket will
be seen after meals hanging to dry on the south wall of the
house.

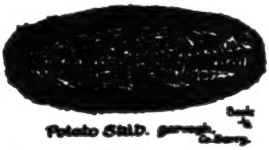

Fig. 31.

To understand the fireside appliances and methods of 354
cooking certain facts should be borne in mind—the absence 262
of the brick oven, the use of turf, a slow-burning fuel admirable
for stewing and for things requiring a steady heat, and the
universal preference for "thin-bread," or "bread in cakes,"
as English observers called it. Once more we have to remind 252
ourselves that parallels to surviving habits can be found 40
centuries back, for pottery baking slabs are known from
Neolithic western Europe and of course oatcakes are best
baked in this way. Flagstone griddles were apparently
common down to a few centuries ago, and a dated specimen of a
bakestone is illustrated in Fig. 33. Though oatcakes are now
baked on the griddle, it is not long since they were set upright
before the fire after drying a little, and turned frequently.
The simple "bread-stick" (Fig. 32) or even a lump of turf
may serve the purpose, but in the north of Ireland, where
bread seems to have been relatively more important than in

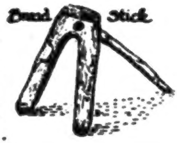

Fig. 32. Co. Galway.
Height 1 ft.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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Oatcake Toasters (Harnen Stands)

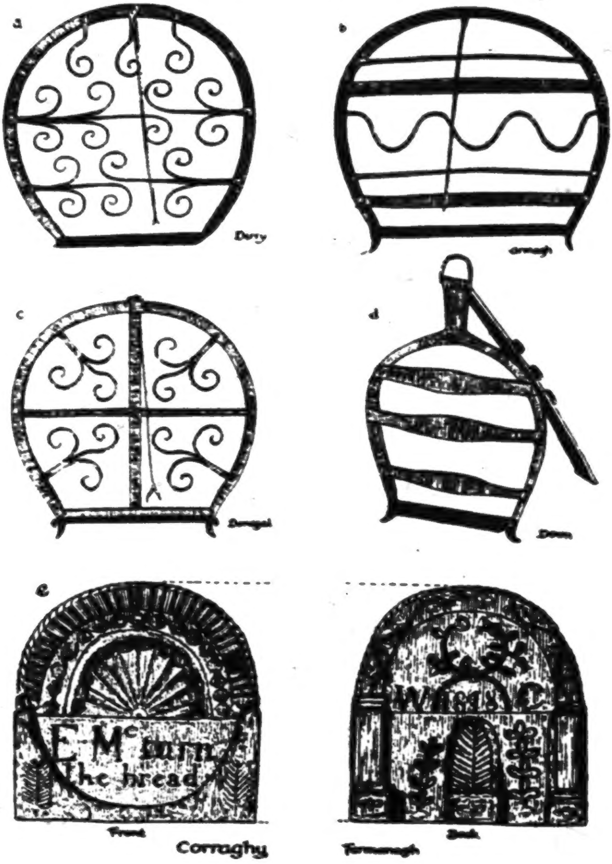
a
Derry
b
Armagh
c
Donegal
d
Down
e
E Mc burn
The bread
Front
Corraghy
Fermanagh
Back

Fig. 33. Scale $\frac{1}{8}$. a, b, c, d, iron ; e, stone.

[p. 74]

the south, local smiths vied with each other in producing elaborately-made toasters, or "harnen stands," which are of many different styles and deserve study before they all find their way to the scrap-heap (Fig. 33). When grates became fashionable, toasting "fenders" were hung on the bars. The large flat oatcake is cut into four quarters or "farls." 252

[415]

[417]

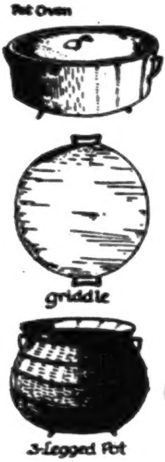

Fig. 34.

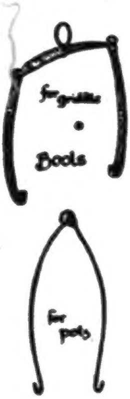

Fig. 35.

Nowadays the oatcakes have been superseded by wheaten bread of various kinds: the flour is often mixed with a bit of maize or barley flour and the baking is done either on the griddle (Fig. 34), in a deep "fry pan," or in the pot-oven or "bastible" (Fig. 34). Meat roasted in the pot-oven can be delicious and I have a taste for rice puddings done in this way. Others may tell of the virtues of the "bap" and of potato "slim bread," and it is not for me to repeat the strictures of Young and Cobbett on the strong tea which they said would ruin the peasantry. It should be added that the thin-bread tradition has been developed by the town bakeries into a bewildering variety of breads and scones.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

415 The round-bottomed three-legged iron pots (Figs. 5 and 34), of various sizes from the small porridge pot to the giant 18 gallon potato pot, are descended from the bronze cauldrons of which there are many specimens in the museums ranging in date from 700 B.C. to 1700 A.D. The cauldron was in old times the special property of the head of the house and figures prominently in Celtic mythology and folklore. The pot has been described as the "maid of all work," but boiling potatoes for man and beast is now its main task. The heaviest pots are going out of use with the introduction of raised grates.

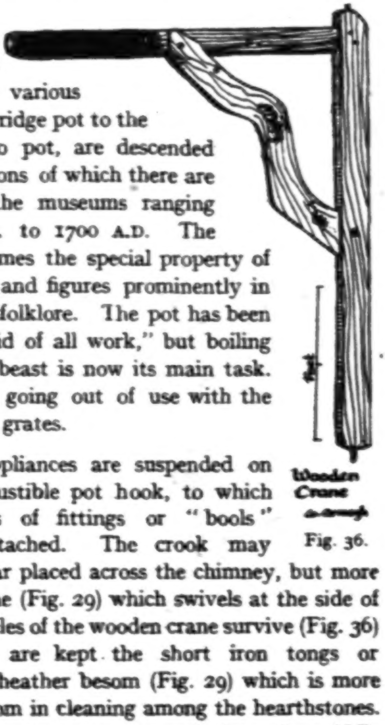

Fig. 36.

These various appliances are suspended on the iron crook or adjustible pot hook, to which many different kinds of fittings or "bools" (Fig. 35) can be attached. The crook may simply hang from a bar placed across the chimney, but more commonly from a crane (Fig. 29) which swivels at the side of the fire. A few examples of the wooden crane survive (Fig. 36) By the fireside, too, are kept the short iron tongs or "mudyees" and the heather besom (Fig. 29) which is more efficient than any broom in cleaning among the hearthstones. A goose-wing serves to dust the pots and clean the griddle when baking. Here by the fireside was hung the crusie oil lamp (Chapter 16, Fig. 105) which is another element of the north-western province of European folk-culture and may have its prototype in the famous "hanging bowls" of over 1,000 years ago. A selection of old-fashioned smith-made iron light-holders of different kinds is shown in Fig. 37. There are more elaborate styles, but the charm of these homely appliances lies in their simplicity. The upper figures from Co. Armagh (a and b) show weavers' candlesticks, made for suspension from the loom. Figure (e) is for holding a "split" or thin strip of resinous bog-fir. The others (c and d) are

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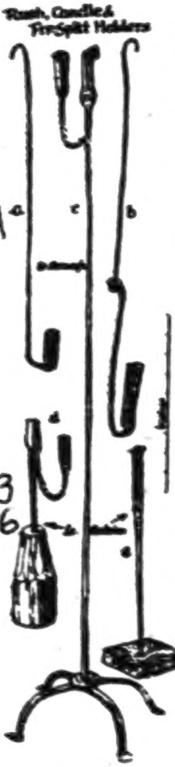

Fig. 37.

rush-light holders with attached candle-sockets. The dipped 373
rushes were sometimes plaited together to make the light last 416
longer. It is of interest to note that the war-time shortage
of oil and candles has led to a revival of the use of rush-lights
in some country districts.

A great amount of interesting information might be 262
collected about the food of the Irish peasantry, the methods of
cooking, times of meals and the many customs and superstititions
connected with food and drink. We may close this
chapter with a few remarks about some foods other than bread
It is curious to reflect that the diet of some western districts,
" potatoes for 10 months and Indian meal for two," is so
largely dependent on crops of New World origin! Potatoes
were made tasty with " kitchen " or " point," that is a bit of [251]
relish such as a salted herring ; and in difficult times they were
only half boiled so that the hard core, called the " moon " or
" bone," might prolong the processes of digestion. In Ulster
the name given to July was " the blue month " because it was
a time of scarcity between the old potatoes and the new crop,
but generally speaking milk products were consumed during
the summer months. Meat, by which the countryman means [251]
beef, was often salted down and reserved for winter use, but
meat eating tended to be restricted to certain seasons or
festivals such as Christmas, Shrove and Easter.

Another seasonal food was the " sowens " or porridge made from soured " meal-seeds " sifted from the oatmeal. It was traditionally eaten at Hallowe'en ; and the Irish name for the 1st of November is Samhain, or " Sowin." I have heard this dish nicknamed " water bewitched." The thin liquid resulting from steeping the fine meal-dust was also drunk and called " thewin," a substitute for buttermilk. A kind of whey (" troander ") was made by mixing sweet milk and buttermilk, and " drammock " was a harvest drink consisting of raw oatmeal and water. Then there is the boxty bread made from potato flour and cooked on the griddle. Many traditional foods and drinks are now little more than memories and of some, for instance " heather beer," the country folk say that " the secret has been lost." But one might still

262 make a long list of the plants and herbs which are gathered
and dried for use as simples. In some areas, for example
Tyrone and Derry, it is recorded that the cattle used to be
237 bled in summer, " in a smooth place, each layer of coagulating
262 blood being strewn with salt until a little mound was formed,
which was cut up in squares and laid by for use as food in the
scarce time of the year." In Wicklow (1780) " they bleed
their horses and cows, and mix the blood with meal for food."
273 In the days before sugar was known honey played a considerable
part in domestic economy and mead or metheglin, made
from honey, was once a popular beverage. We have no
knowledge of the period when whiskey distillation was first
practised but stills and worms of some antiquity have been
found in the bogs, and it is natural to correlate the popularity
of whiskey and poteen with the dampness of the climate. A
fact worth recording is that until recently illicit stills were
made and kept in repair by travelling tinkers in whom it is
perhaps not extravagant to see shades of the skilled craftsmen
of the later Bronze Age who made cauldrons out of sheet
bronze (*cf.* Fig. 5).

252 Far into the historic period heated stones were employed in cooking and it may be that memories of this old method linger on. The nearest thing I have seen is the custom of plunging a hot poker into cow's milk to " singe it " when it is given to lambs. The explanation offered was that this made its taste resemble that of sheep's milk.

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CHAPTER IX.

FARM BUILDINGS.

First in importance in this pastoral country comes the 343
cow byre, which is often an old dwelling house converted or 234
an extension built on to the end of the kitchen. We have seen
that in the west it is not long since the cows were housed in the
bottom end of the kitchen, and even now one gets the
impression from the proximity of the byre and its smells that
there is a reluctance to be separated by any distance from the
beasts which play such a large part in the life and traditions
of the countryside. Along one side of the byre, above the
feeding place, runs the rannel- or revel-tree to which the
vertical cow-stakes are secured at intervals: "thin as a
ravel-tree" is an expression sometimes heard. Alternatively,
in the west, the stakes are held in place by iron staples or
perforated stone slabs let into the wall. Iron chains have
almost entirely replaced the rush "binnen ropes" (Chapter 14)
which were fastened to a plaited ring of sally, hazel or rowan—
called a "woody"—sliding up and down the stake. In Co. [184]
Clare the animals were secured by a straw rope tied round the
horns, and no doubt different methods could be described
from various districts. Milking times also vary from place to
place, and there is no topic about which so much lore might be
collected as about cows and their products. It is commonly
said that there is a right and a wrong side on which to milk a
cow. In Ireland, so far as my observation goes, it is the
right-hand side.

[p. 79]

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Behind the cows there runs a slab-lined drain or groop, which carries the refuse through the "groop hole" in the wall to the midden. Hanging from the rannel-tree you may perchance see a charm in the shape of a perforated flint
[776] pebble, while over the door, decaying Brigid's Crosses dating
[751] back for several successive years show that the cattle are under the special protection of the Irish saint. In the byre gable it is not uncommon to see a dove-cote, at any rate along
[235] the east coast where English influence has been strong since Norman times. Pigeons are fond of heat and thrive near farm animals. In Lecale, Co. Down, I have seen nests made of straw rope hung above the horses in the stable.

343
251
The barn is not infrequently built above the byre. When the dwelling house alongside remains, in the Irish tradition, single-storied, the effect of the towering barn is rather incongruous. This arrangement makes it simple to feed the animals, provides a springy wooden floor for thrashing, and also gives a better draught for the purpose. Moreover, the raised position helps to make the corn secure from damp and rats. The barn has opposite doors and half doors to regulate the through draught and to keep out stray animals while work goes on inside. Access to the barn is obtained by external stone steps or a sloping ramp, under which the stone dog kennel is often built in. Some of the activities and appurtenances of the barn are described in Chapter 14.

343
Little need be said about the stable, since small farms have as a rule only one mare. In the old-time single-roomed kitchen-byres, the mare had her stall alongside the cows, and you will sometimes see the keeping-hole above the back door where the brush and curry comb were stored. The stable, like the byre, may be attached to the house or may be separate, but for convenience and economy it tends to be built as part of a range of buildings. In decayed rundale clusters now occupied by only one or two holders there were, ready to hand, many old dwelling houses which could be put to different uses as "offices."

Before we turn to the housing of other livestock, mention should be made of the turf-house, for which many different

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kinds of construction are employed. Some districts use strong 343 stone buildings—for example of the bee-hive style to be described below—others roofless rectangles of stone with one end open, and others again timber-posted structures with roofs and walls of many different materials. These supplies are generally supplemented by well-built turf-stacks, and it used to be the custom to build a great stack against the gable of the house, both for shelter and to keep the house warm. Turf-stacks were occasionally built hollow to serve as a pigsty. [23] In the north of Ireland the pig is by no means universally kept, though most old homesteads have a building which once did duty as a sty, and in some parts of the country these are of bee-hive construction, so strongly built that they have defied the ravages of time.

Just as old practices live on as children's games, so certain ancient types of buildings have descended in the social scale in the course of history. The bee-hive corbelled huts and the corn-drying kilns are examples. Both are circular in plan and built of dry stones or stones and mud. In the Gaeltacht the bee-hive houses are used, from Mayo to Kerry, for storing milk or turf. They are made by overlapping the flat slabs of the walls until they meet at the top in a false dome—a style of building which, in its origin, long precedes the arch and is seen at its best in some of the oldest monuments of human industry in Ireland, the prehistoric chambered tombs of the Boyne [172] valley. Not far from this metropolis of ancient culture, in the Carlingford Hills of north Louth, Mr. H. G. Tempest has shown me several corbelled huts, some of which are still used as pigsties, while in Lecale in Down there are many examples, both circular and square in plan, which have been used as pigsties and hen houses (Figs. 38 & 39). These are generally grouted on top and whitewashed, but those of Louth and the west may have a covering of earth which, growing a crop of grass and weeds, gives the little houses the appearance of natural hillocks. Similar pigsties are known in south-eastern Wales, and have been described by Dr. I. C. Peate in his book *The Welsh House*. Corbelled huts are also used as pigsties and poultry houses in Caithness and the Orkneys.

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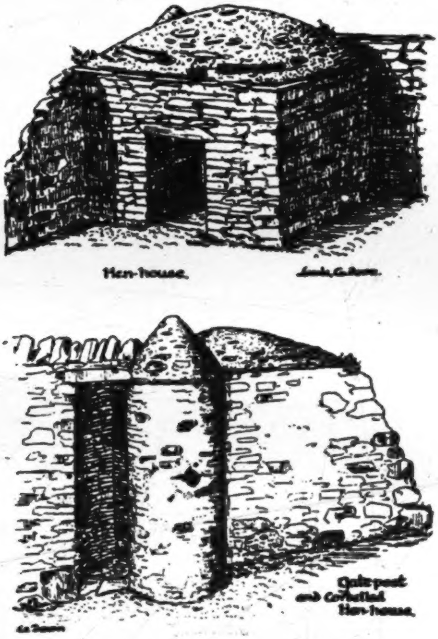
Hen-house.
Gate-post and Corbelled Hen-house.

Fig. 38. Two views of hen-house.

515
343 Some of the holy wells visited throughout Ireland for their reputed curative powers are protected by corbelled coverings of some antiquity: one may cite the wells at Struell near Downpatrick and Ronogue's Well near Cork. Domestic wells also frequently show some degree of corbelling, but free standing well-covers like that shown in Fig. 41 are rare. To the same class of construction belong most of the surviving [757] sweat-houses which were resorted to by rheumatic cases, profuse sweating being induced by heating the interior with turf fires beforehand. In certain counties, for example Cavan, these structures are quite common and were used into living memory. In Rathlin Island I was told that girls would go to

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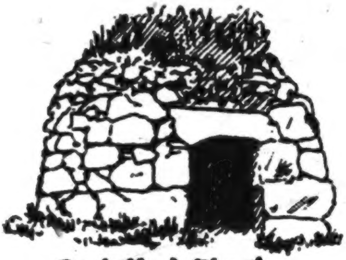
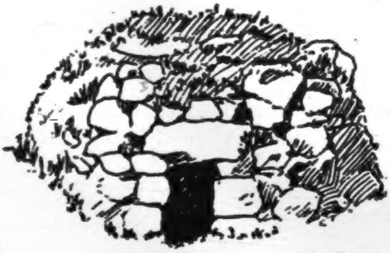


Corbelled Pig sty

Fig. 39.

the sweathouses in order to improve their complexions before paying a visit to the Lammas fair at Ballycastle. It should be added that the treatment is said to have included a final plunge into cold water: running water is generally found alongside the sweat-houses (Fig. 40).

Such buildings are, from the simplicity of their construction, undateable: there is nothing to show, in many cases, whether they were erected a hundred, a thousand or even four thousand years ago, and though one suspects that many examples are no more than a century or two old—indeed the Gaeltacht turf-houses are still being built—they are in truth ageless. But the functions of the stone-roofed houses have changed. Once tombs of the dead and homes of the 343



Sweathouse

Fig. 40.

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343 living, they have been relegated to lesser positions in the economy of peasant life. Apart from the well-known monastic cells of Skellig Michael and other early Christian sites, there is good evidence that oval "clochâns," as they are termed, were built as peasant houses in stoney districts such as the Aran Islands. They have been described as having two opposite doors and measuring as much as 21 ft. by 12 ft., with the walls three feet thick. Dr. Campbell has suggested that the sloping hipped roofs of thatched houses derive from the corbelled ends of such oval clochâns, and has pointed out that some of the oldest surviving thatched cabins of the west are somewhat oval in plan.

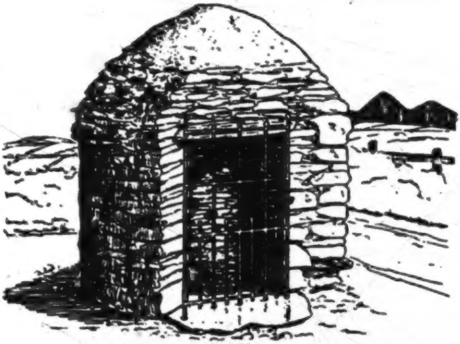
A Corbelled Well.

Fig. 41.

While a full discussion of this interesting thesis would be out of place here, there are other possibilities in the shape of surviving structures. I have in mind the simple device known as the "flat roof," which is of widespread occurrence in Ireland, and which, from the ease of its construction, was probably common in very early times. It is employed on cart-houses and other outbuildings where the width is not too great to bear the weight of the solid roof. Horizontal beams and branches span the breadth from wall to wall and carry a superstructure of potato haulms, whins, old straw or turf and

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similar farm rubbish, which is roughly thatched with rushes. 343
In building up loose material of this kind, as in making a turf-stack or a potato clamp, the hipped form is naturally adopted (Fig. 42) and *cf.* the turf stack or rick (Fig. 93). I have often seen old houses or outbuildings with upright gables the triangular tops of which, above the level of the eaves, are built of sods or turf. While other explanations may be offered, it seems to me that this carries on the tradition of the "flat" roof and hints that it was more generally found in former times.

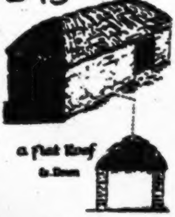

Fig. 42.

Corn-drying kilns were mentioned above as an example of 343
structures which have descended in the social scale. It seems 251
likely that constructionally they are miniature replicas of circular houses, and it is certainly true that they are now put to uses which cannot be called legitimate. They are used surreptitiously in preparing grain for making poteen, and I have seen examples built not long ago for drying a cargo of corn recovered from a wreck. A few generations ago every little village had its corn kiln, but the large kilns attached to corn mills have done away with them. So far as I have been able to find out the Irish kilns were all circular or semicircular and they were often built into a sloping hill. Some were open on top like a lime-kiln but others had a conical thatch. Again, one variety had the fire underneath while in another the heat was drawn along a flue from a fireplace some distance away. The corn was laid on a linen sheet resting on a carefully prepared bed of straw; hence the phrase "soft as kiln bedding." The dried corn was ground forthwith in a hand quern.

Although underground refuges or "souterrains"—called 343
"caves" by country folk—come into the category of ancient monuments they deserve mention here for two reasons. The first is because they often show in their roofs the technique of corbelling described above. The second fact which gives them interest is that, though some are known to have been built in the Bronze Age, they have been used as hiding places at many periods. I have found in them "ammunition" of 1,000 years ago side by side with explosives dating from the

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343 "troubles" of 25 years ago. Moreover underground "hides" have been constructed in recent times by poteen-makers. A description of a Donegal example said to have been made about 150 years ago will be found in *Antiquity*, June, 1939, p. 220.

351
361 Finally, something should be said about the disposition of the farm buildings, but this is a subject which calls for research. Broadly speaking the arrangement native to the country is some kind of long house, with the offices under the same roof as the kitchen and room. I use the word "native" because in areas of strong English influence such as Wexford what seems to be an introduced type of lay-out is the courtyard style where the buildings are grouped round the sides of a square. There are many approximations to this arrangement in various parts of the east and south of Ireland, and I do not think, as my friend Colonel R. G. Berry has suggested, that the type is native. Where the Old Irish homestead has a number of outbuildings these tend to be placed in front of and parallel to the dwelling house. Efforts to persuade the peasant to put his manure heap and his animals behind the house have, until recently, failed, for he likes to keep an eye on his wealth!

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CHAPTER X.

SEEDTIME.

Except in a few districts where winter wheat is grown the 241
farmer's year may be said to begin in spring when, from 221
February on, the land is ploughed or dug for the new crops.
Several arguments are advanced against autumn ploughing—
that the land is too wet and that the winter destroys the
seed-bed—but as with many other things the preference is
best explained by deep-rooted custom. So long as the land
was held in rundale autumn ploughing was out of the question
since the stock had the run of the whole townland after
Hallowe'en.

We have very little information about old Irish ploughs. 241
Owing to the fact that they were made almost entirely of wood 407
archæology cannot help us much, but shaped stones that may
have been shares and coulters have been found, and plough-irons
do sometimes turn up. The discovery by Dr. O'Neill
Hencken of a large iron coulter in the Ballinderry crannog
shows that a heavy plough necessitating a big team had
reached Co. Westmeath by the 10th century A.D. Pipe-rolls of
the 13th century refer to plough teams of 8 oxen in Co.
Meath: this was the normal complement under the English
three-field system. At the other end of the scale, as it were,
there survived into living memory along the west coast the
custom of attaching the horse to the plough or harrows by [492]
the tail, and although the practice was severely condemned it
had the advantage that the horse would stop if the plough

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241 struck a rock, thus saving the share, the traces and the
407 ploughman from injury. The tying of the tail-hair to the
[492] traces, which were commonly of sugán or fir rope, required a
difficult knot known in later days to very few. This undoubtedly ancient practice seems to have been linked with other customs such as walking backwards before the plough horses, burning the corn in the straw, and plucking or clipping wool from the sheep whenever it was required. It appears that we have in this group of survivals an older culture-layer overlaid by newer methods some of which are themselves of high antiquity. There is some evidence that the original simpler wooden plough mentioned below, together with the clod-breaker and the winnowing tray (Chapter 14) belong to the older layer, whereas the improved wooden plough, the harrow and the flail are later arrivals.

English visitors of the 18th century and the writers of the Statistical Accounts published by the Royal Dublin Society have given many particulars of the varying practices of a century and a half ago. From them we select a few observations. The method of ploughing in Co. Clare was to use four horses abreast, the driver walking backwards between the two middle horses. This is also described as "the old method" in Co. Roscommon. Four oxen were employed in Co. Dublin and Co. Tipperary, "never less than four oxen or four horses" in Kilkenny, six in Meath, three in Fermanagh and two in King's County. The large teams of some regions
[476 may imply that co-aration had at one time been practised.
The four horses of the north Antrim plough-team were
171] contributed or "pooled" by four farmers under the system
of "morrowing" or "neighbour dealing" which finds ready parallels in Scotland. In Co. Clare this pooling custom is known as "cooring," and in other parts as "milling." The Irish farm horse, it should be remembered, is a small light breed: except near large towns heavy cart horses are rarely seen.

Nevertheless in the more backward parts the two horse plough seems to have been general, as it is to-day, and it has been supposed that the two-ox plough was standard in early

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Celtic times. I have never seen the wooden plough in use, but I have attempted to reconstruct a drawing (Fig. 43) with the help of discarded specimens and descriptions given by men who have worked with them, and I find that my sketch closely resembles an example in the National Museum of Ireland which I have since examined. It consists of a short " head " fitted with an iron share or sock attached by means of folded flanges like the turf spade or the loy, and also shod with an iron sole-shoe. Into the head is morticed the main handle, in such a way that its left side forms a straight line with the head and with the straight side of the sock. To the main handle are fastened both the " wee handle " and the long " beam " which in turn is keyed to the head and carries the coulter. Finally a block of wood known as the rest is secured to the right side of the head and has above it a nine-inch mould board. The plough horses had no bits or reins, and the outfit needed two men, one to hold and one to drive. It was often necessary for a third hand to walk alongside " with a strong stick bearing on the beam to keep the plough in the ground."

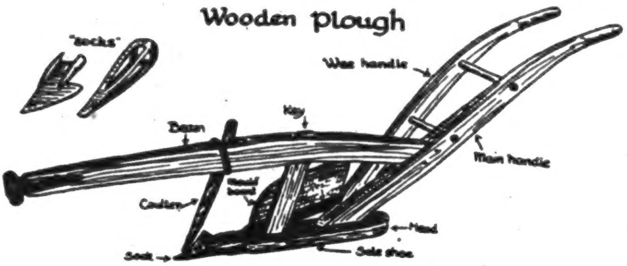

Fig. 43.

The wooden plough was lighter than the all-iron plough, and was considered to break the earth better than the smooth share and curved breast of the swing plough which took its place, but it did not effectively turn the sods: the so-called mould-board did little more than prevent some of the soil from falling back into the furrow. Yet this is the " new wooden plough " which in Donegal replaced only a century

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241 ago a still simpler plough described as a "crooked stick armed 407 with a bit of iron," which must have been in no way different, apart from "the bit of iron," from the plough of the Bronze Age. In fact there were wide areas where a plough of any [412] kind was practically unknown, and it must be admitted that in the small stoney fields of the west the spade is much more serviceable. It is still the only implement used on hundreds of small farms, and at best the spade had to supplement the old types of plough around the headlands and among the stones and rocks. Moreover the wooden plough left the ground so uneven that lumps had to be broken with a maul [412] or "mell" (Fig. 44) and holes filled in with the spade to prevent the seed being "lost." This process was known in Co. Antrim as "mannering." Cross-ploughing seems to be an old Irish custom and helps to explain why the field system is rectangular in contrast to the long strips of ploughland associated with the heavy English wheeled plough.

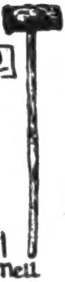

Fig. 44.

241 In preparing ground whether for corn or potatoes the practice was to plough the land in narrow ridges varying in width from about 4 to 12 sods (say 3½ to 10 feet) according to the depth and nature of the soil. The furrow or "sheugh" between the ridges would be some two feet wide. This was scraped with the plough but not turned, and it provided the earth for shovelling on the ridges after the seed had been sown. "An old ridge in the ground," runs an Irish saying, "outlives three yews"; and indeed ancient cultivation ridges can be seen at all but the highest levels and have been observed underneath bogs when they are cut away. The plough ridges

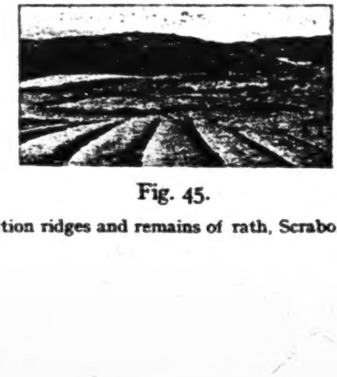

Fig. 45.

Old cultivation ridges and remains of rath, Scrabo, Co. Down.

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are nowadays much wider: the narrow ridges and deep furrows are quite unsuited to the use of machinery (Fig. 45). 241

February, March and April are the busy ploughing months. Corn was generally sown directly "on the furrow," but the seed-bed often required careful preparation either by breaking the clods and dragging along a strong thorn bush weighted with stones or by harrowing. The time is remembered when the old "six bull" wooden harrow was fitted with wooden tines or cows' horns, arranged in consecutive order and not "staggered." These were frequently dragged by the horse's tail. Oats were sown with a one-hand cast from a linen sheet hung round the neck. This is the method still employed on small farms, although the practice of covering the seed with the shovel is almost abandoned. An alternative method, which is perhaps of fairly recent introduction, is to sow with the "fiddle and bow"—the silent fiddler making a striking picture as he strides firmly up and down the field. The seed drill, it goes without saying, is gradually replacing hand sowing, but the older generation is convinced that much better crops resulted from burying the seed, and it is claimed that the land was better drained by the deep furrows between the ridges.

Potatoes are still planted in the old ridge-and-furrow way 244 on small farms. We need not describe the drill method which is universally adopted on larger farms, except to notice that different methods and many types of simple implements are used to prepare and level the drills. My colleague, Mr. O. Davies, tells me that a common practice in Co. Wexford is to break the lumps in the drills with a "drag," a heavy block of granite on which the farmer stands as he drives the horse along the drill. When old grassland is broken up for potatoes, set-rigs or "lazy-beds" are made with the spade (Fig. 46), as in the Scottish Highlands. In the north the push plough or "flachter" (Chapter 15 and Figs. 83-85) was formerly used for this purpose.

The finished lazy-bed closely resembles the ploughed potato ridge, but it is all spade-work and gets its name from the fact that the sod under the ridge is not dug. The width of

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[462]

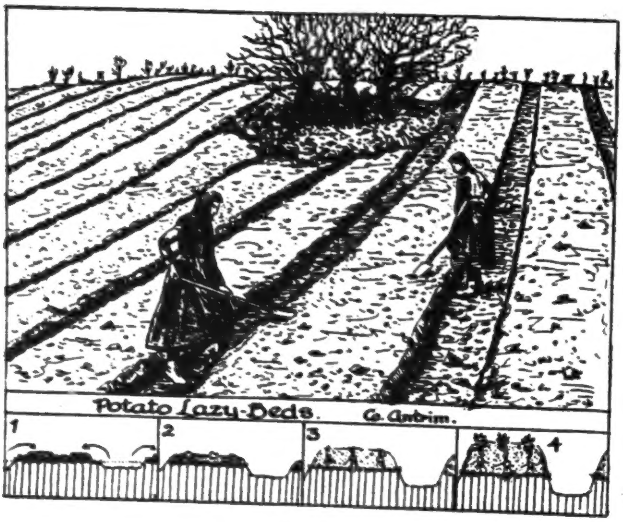

Fig. 46.

the bed and the furrow varies considerably from one locality to another. The latter may be as much as three feet on shallow soils, for it is essential to have sufficient earth both to cover the seeds and to mould the young plants, generally in two stages, later on, but an average width is 1½ feet. Similarly the ridges, while about 4 feet wide as a rule, may be as narrow as two feet. The first step is to turn over the sods from the furrow, one sod on each side, and place them face down, that is grass against grass, on the ridges, so that when they are buried the grass rots and helps to feed the growing crop. With the many methods of turning the sod, of preparing the seed-bed, manuring, setting and covering the potatoes it is impossible to deal here, for the customs differ from one district to another, the manure being spread, for example, sometimes under and
244 sometimes over the seeds. But it is relevant to notice that
412 the old Irish spade or loy (Chapter 13) is a specialized implement adapted for sod cutting and turning and not for

digging or shovelling. For these processes the digging fork 244
and long-handled shovel are the proper tools. (Fig. 65). It 412
should also be remarked that the preparation of lazy-beds
was communal team-work, undertaken by groups of from [462]
8 to 16 men who shared their labour under the system of [476]
voluntary co-operation which distinguished the village
community. The custom is maintained in a few localities.

The loy served in certain districts as a dibber for setting the potatoes "against the back of the spade." but various special dibbers were also used. There was, for instance, the large two-handed "steeveen" found from Co. Leitrim to Co. Clare. As another example of a dibber we illustrate the clumsy-looking "stamp" from Co. Armagh (Fig. 47), employed in sowing turnips. Reference will be made elsewhere (Chapter 16) to the use of seaweed as manure. Old thatch, with its content of soot from the turf fire, is occasionally used as a fertilizer, and I am told that in Achill Island miniature stone, sod or turf buildings used as "soot houses" are roofed with rafters and scraws each autumn. Fires are lit in them, the smoke depositing soot on its passage through the thatch. This is then stripped off and, with the ashes of the fires, spread on the land as manure in spring. The thatch of the Hebridean black houses was utilized in the same way.

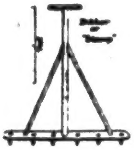

Fig. 47.

A practice which was formerly widespread and attracted a 241
great deal of heated discussion in the period of agricultural 412
development at the end of the 18th century was the preparing
of waste ground for cultivation by "paring and burning," or
"denshiring." It seems probable that this was a survival of
ancient custom, and I believe that old-fashioned tool, the
flachter, was probably employed for the purpose, just as its
sister-tool, the breast-plough, was in England. Many types
of tools were perfected for land reclamation, including a [185]
special skinning-plough. In the south-west a heavy hoe or
mattock, known as a graffan—similar to the implement still
used in Kerry for breaking clods on potato ridges—was
popular as a paring tool, the sod being rolled with the foot as
it was cut. By such laborious processes, and by centuries of

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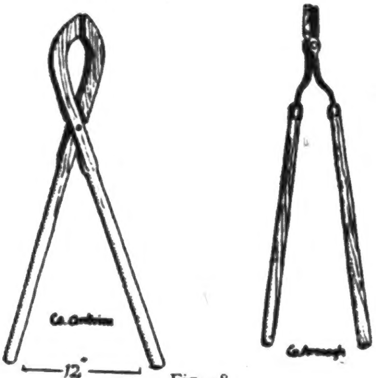
241 toil and grazing, by plough and spade, hoof and muzzle, have
412 Ireland's green fields been "moulded."



Clips

Fig. 48.

Although we cannot touch on the other crops and have
given a very inadequate idea of the bustle, worries and
humours of the Irish springtime, when all the crops demand to
be put in the ground at the same time, we must end this
chapter with a few comments on the growing season. The
general practice when thinning root crops is to work on the
[516] knees with the hands: one rarely sees a hoe being used for
thinning. Yet paradoxically corn is weeded, if it gets any
attention at all, with a pair of wooden pincers or thistle-pullers,
called, in Co. Antrim, "clips" (Fig. 48). This tool is already
[184] mentioned in a Tour of Ireland in 1752. The weeders are not
so common in the south of the country and are fitted with iron
pincers in some counties. Another home-made device once
familiar in the north was the crow-scarer or "corn-crake," a
noisy instrument made on the principle of the watchman's
rattle or—to give a modern instance—the gas rattle of the
A.R.P. services.

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CHAPTER XI.

HARVEST.

In this chapter we shall give an account of some harvesting 241
customs which depend on a minimum of mechanical appliances. 246
We begin with the hay harvest, the first of the season. The new agriculture represented by turnips and rotation grasses has, in its diffusion from England during the last two centuries, still barely touched the remoter parts of Ireland, where hay until lately had no place in the scheme of cultivation. Successive crops of corn and potatoes were taken so long as the land would yield anything, when it was allowed to grow wild grasses and weeds until the time came to break it up once more. Oat straw, which is never chaffed, to some extent took the place of hay, which, apart from a limited amount of meadow hay and "sprit," was chiefly gathered from waste places and [231] mearings and reserved for horses and milk cows. It should be noticed that the old customs of herding, tethering and spancelling permitted the stock to graze in places where hay could not be made. Moreover natural hay, ripened but left uncut, was utilized to a great extent along the mild coasts.

Scandinavian archæologists have shown that the practice 246
of preserving grass as hay for winter use began in that region during the cold wet phase of climate known as the Sub-Atlantic (Chapter 4). So it may have been in Ireland, too: the scythe and the iron hook have their origin in the Early Iron Age, and some of the methods of securing the crop can have changed little in two thousand years. On small farms

[p. 95]

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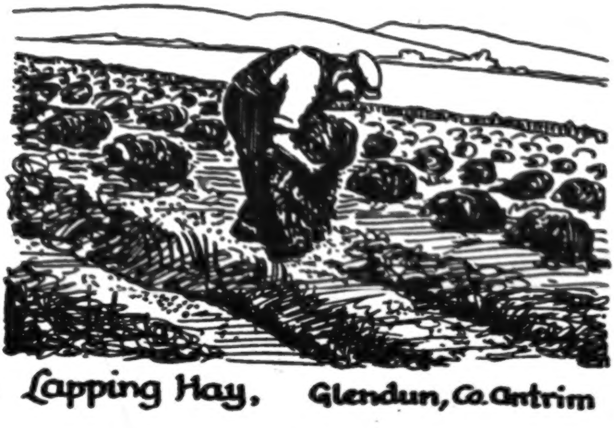
246 throughout the north of Ireland the hay is made and "saved"—how eloquent is this word of the desperate struggle with the weather!—almost entirely by hand. The traditional date for commencing the hay harvest is the famous 12th of July, and an even more celebrated day—March 17th—was the time for "closing" the hay-fields. Cut with the scythe, supplemented by the hook and by hand-pulling on steep banks or around trees and bushes, the swathes are shaken and gathered into parallel wind-rows or "coles" and then "lapped," that is folded into small muff-like heaps against the leg (Fig. 49). In lapping, the cut grass is smoothed down on both sides so that the rain will run off, while the inside is [184] left open to allow the air to pass through. The practise of lapping is found as far south as Meath and Galway but I have not seen it further south: it would be interesting to trace its exact distribution and compare it with that of other cultural traits. Even in districts well-equipped with machinery the method of lapping is retained, as an alternative to tying into sheaves, for the crops of seed-hay which are a valuable source of income on the small farms of lowland Ulster. This



Lapping Hay, Glendun, Co. Antrim

Fig. 49.

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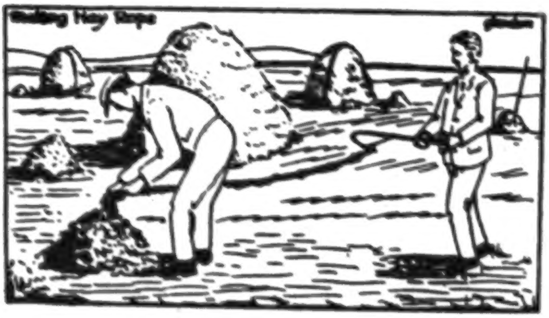
rotation grass is referred to as upland hay to distinguish it 246
from meadow hay, although in fact it often grows at lower levels. Sometimes at this stage the hay is hung on bushes and fences something after the Scandinavian manner.

When sufficiently dry the laps are opened and the hay piled into small cocks (ricks or lumps), and this process is repeated a number of times if the weather is bad until the stage of large hand-cocks is reached, or, if the hay is in good condition, even larger "tramp-cocks," trodden down firmly. The cocks are tied down with a hay-rope made on the spot (Fig. 50) and left "to season" for a period which may be only a week or two but which, to the stranger, seems generally an unconscionable time. In this matter the Irish are confirmed in what the English call their lazy ways. Admittedly there are dry years when it would do no harm to the hay to stack it at once, but the Irish method is adapted to the average season, and rooted in a firmly-fixed rota of farm work. In August the turf must be carried home while the [314]
bogs are firm enough to take the carts, and in many parts the busy time of flax-pulling and retting is come. Although these alternative demands on the farmer's time are not always present, they may have helped in the past to standardize the 492
rotation of work. Moreover, when the opportunity of carry- 246



[283]

Fig. 50.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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492 246 ing the hay to the haggard presents itself, quick advantage can be taken of the weather by transporting the cocks as single loads by the simple process of putting a rope round the bottom and hauling them with a horse or two to the haggard. I have also seen a long iron runner placed under the cock, [493] which is thus " sliped " home, but on larger farms a hay-cart is employed. The Irish hay-cart is a specialized vehicle, used for no other purpose : its low platform can be backed against the cock, which is then drawn on to it by a winding gear. This is an interesting example of the versatility which the Irish have shown in developing the two-wheeled cart, their primary mode of transport (Chapter 12). When other horse-drawn implements are employed in hay-making they are frequently [407] old-fashioned in their sturdy simplicity, for example the wooden hay rake or " sweep " with its long ash teeth.

246 In the haggard (" hay-guard ") the stacks are built on prepared foundations of stones and heather or bushes which " draw the wind in under." Sometimes one sees them built [171] around an upright pole, as in the Tyrol and elsewhere abroad. The stacks are either circular (" pikes " in Co. Antrim) or oblong (" havels ") : there are advantages and disadvantages attaching to both shapes and it is doubtful whether, as has been suggested, there is any correlation with regional house-shapes and types. But local styles and methods of finishing the stack need working out. The rush thatch is secured by hay-ropes crossed and recrossed in various patterns or applied as a continuous spiral (Fig. 51).

248 Flax, probably one of the oldest Irish crops, was grown very widely before the Industrial Revolution brought a concentration in the north-east. Small patches are still grown in Donegal for the sole purpose of providing the thatch, the tradition of flax cultivation surviving long after the home industries of spinning and weaving died out. Though mechanical pullers are now being adopted, the flax crop, which must be drawn out, roots and all, is one that lends itself to [476] hand labour. Teams of 8 or a dozen pullers—and sometimes as many as thirty—work together, the men being exchanged or "swapped" between neighboring farms, and a day of flax-pulling traditionally ended with dancing.

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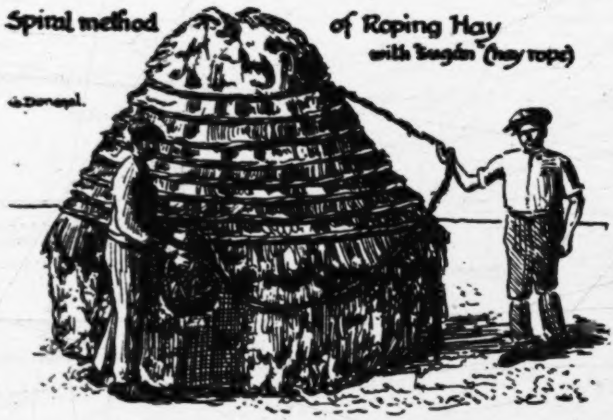

Fig. 51.

or "swapped" between neighbouring farms, and a day of flax-pulling traditionally ended with dancing. The flax is harvested in August, after the fleeting pale blue flower has gone. Prepared beforehand and lying ready to hand in bundles of 60 or so (enough for a certain number of stooks) are the lint bands of green rushes for tying the sheaves or "beets." The bands consist of two lengths of rushes, placed with the flowering ends together and tied in a reef-knot with a single movement involving a quick manipulation of thumbs and fingers (Fig. 52). The beets are stooked heads down, in which position also they are drowned or "dubbed," as soon as may be, in the "lint hole" or flax dam, where soft water has been warming up ready for the steeping. A horizontal layer of beets and a covering of bracken weighted with large stones completes the filling of the dam, and the process of retting, which takes on the average 10 or 12 days, is soon advertized by a smell of foul yet fascinating intensity. We need not follow the flax on its career from the rank pit to

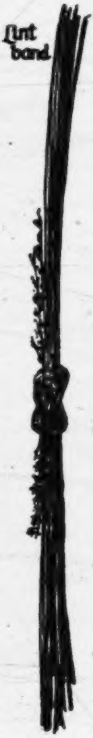

Fig. 52.

248 the purest of linen—the story has often been told—and though the scutching mill with its busy waterwheel is an intimate part of the wintry countryside, the flax and tow soon pass into the factories. But we cannot omit a reference to the picturesque oblong stacks "sleighs" or "rays" in which the flax is built after being taken from the dam and dried. And we have referred in another place (Chapter 7), to the "shows" or waste which comes from the scutching mill.

243 But the most important crop throughout Ireland, and as a rule the most difficult to save because it comes late in the season, is oats. September is the harvest month, but in the hills October frequently sees the corn uncarried and even uncut. It is on record that in 1817—in Co. Armagh—"the grain was not reaped in many places until after Christmas."
[422] Often the equinoctial gales play havoc with the stooks, and in the days of small scattered rundale plots it was customary for each holder to tie his sheaves with a proprietary knot so that he might claim his own.

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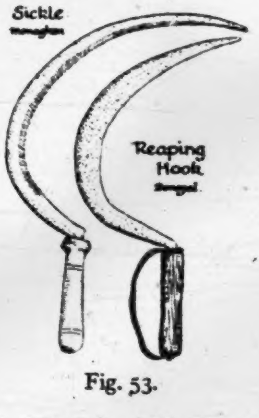

Fig. 53.

Both the toothed hook or sickle (Fig. 53) and the smooth "scythe hook" are used in reaping: the reaping machine and the self-binder have not reached many parts. Sickles are of several varieties, classified in the catalogues as round,

square, crane and "Sligo." The steel edge of its narrow 243
blade is notched on the underside, the notches radiating so 412
that they all cut at an angle of about 70 degrees.

It is much more difficult to use than the smooth hook; the straw must be held firmly in one hand and sawn through with a pulling motion. Some writers have indulged in idealized pictures of hand reaping which bear little relation to the cruel toil and "terrible strain" more faithfully and unforgettably portrayed by Richard Jefferies in his "Field and Hedgerow." There was no respite for reapers or binders: "Down with the head and up with the tail" was the descriptive phrase which I was given in the Glens of Antrim. In some parts, however, the reaper knelt down on one knee. Women and children generally did the binding. The corn was cut before it was fully ripe, "between green and gold," and as an illustration of the interdependence of the old ways it is worth noting that such straw was much more suitable for good thatching than the dry straw from the reaper. The old-fashioned scythe (see Frontispiece), not yet entirely displaced by the new style, was straight-handled. A short bladed tool, known in Co. Antrim as the "bramble scythe," is used for cutting coarse vegetation or mowing hay around bushes.

Corn stooks vary greatly in the number of sheaves they 243
contain and in the methods of construction. They are often tied at the top with a straw band, and cap-sheaves are frequently seen. In wet districts the sheaves are later built into small round stacks, "barts" or "huts," until the time comes to carry them home. On small farms this is still
done on the back, using a burden rope (Chapter 14), but the [482]
rick-lifter is also employed. Or the sheaves are piled high on ponies so that they resemble walking stacks. At harvest time two-ply twists of straw are worn in the button-hole (Fig. 114): they are part of the ceremonial of harvest time. The custom is general in north-eastern Ireland but I am not aware of it from other parts: it may be a feature of the Plantation. More widespread and fundamental are the practices, now mere

243 survivals, associated with the cutting of the last sheaf—the "churn" or the "Cailleach" (Chapter 19).

Corn stacks are more varied in shape than haystacks and need better protection from weather and from vermin. [824] Sprigs of apple-mint (*M. arvensis*) .may be thrown through the sheaves to keep away mice. The stone stack-stands or staddels, called "hovels," are a picturesque feature of the stackyard in some districts. With their steep tops rising above the house clusters, the golden corn stacks turn the little Irish villages into African kraals, or in the fields one may count as many as 30 round stacks in a row, rising against the sky up the hillside. Then the whole countryside seems fuller than usual. New colours and odours meet one on all sides, and the horses as they pass give off the sharp smell which comes from crunching the fresh oats. The country smiths used to make a small light fork or "pike," fitted with a long handle, for throwing the last sheaves high up (Fig. 66). The stacks are thatched with rushes, twisted into bundles known as "stapples" which are pushed into the straw.

[285]
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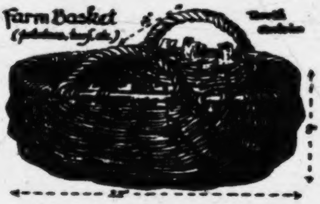

Fig. 54.

241 We cannot touch on the methods of harvesting and stacking the other cereal crops, wheat, barley and rye, but a word must be said in conclusion on the last harvest of the year—the root crops. Although turnips and the new sugar beet are important in some areas, it is the potato crop which means most to the peasant. All available hands are in the fields, gathering the precious food-supply into wicker baskets or boxes (Figs. 54 and 55); and the school children are given

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special holidays. The potatoes are sorted, the small and faulty roots being put aside for the stock and poultry. The crop is then "pitted," that is piled in long heaps in the field and covered with straw and earth. October is the potato month, and under the old system the limiting date was Hallowe'en, for after that the animals were allowed to roam freely over the village or townland. It should be noticed that early potatoes are little esteemed in Ireland apart from commercial cultivation in a few coastal districts. A curious example of specialized potato-growing is cited in Chapter 16. 241

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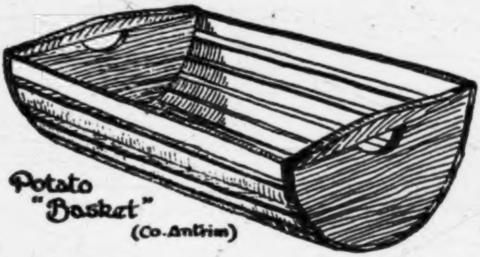

Fig. 55. (22" by 16")

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CHAPTER XII.

CARTS AND ROADS.

499 It has been claimed that the humble vehicles of certain regions of survival such as the Glens of Antrim represent an evolutionary sequence, the assumption being that the sledge or "slipe" was developed locally into the slide-car and the latter into the solid-wheeled car until the stage of the spoke-wheeled Scotch cart was reached. This argument ignores the wide distribution of similar means of transport in countries overseas, and the extent to which simple ideas are diffused from a common centre. It would be strange indeed if that centre were to be located on the extreme periphery of Europe when parallel forms of transport are found as far away as China. Nevertheless the Irish vehicles are of great ethnological interest, and they have survived because they are adapted to the soft turf bogs or the steep mountain sides. In more recent times the two-wheeled cart has blossomed into several specialized means of transport such as the side-car, the long-car, and the hay-cart or rick-lifter (Chapter 11). The latter is also found in Lowland Scotland and may possibly have originated there.

482 But something must first be said about the still humbler transport agents such as the burden-rope, the back-creel and side-creel, the use of which has greatly declined, however, during the last half century. The two former show to what extent men and women, but especially women, act as beasts of

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Antrim

[Facing p. 105]

SLIDE CAR WITH KISH : STRAW HARNESS

LOW-BACK CAR

BOX-CAR WITH DISC WHEELS

SPOKE-WHEELED CAR

Plate IV.
ALL FROM GLENS OF ANTRIM

482 burden in Ireland as among other peasantries. The burden-rope, constructed of rushes, horse-hair or grass-rope (Chap. [283] 14 and Figs. 79 & 80), was employed for carrying surprisingly large loads of hay, corn or bushes—" as much as a pony could draw," I have been told—while the burden-creel, slung over one shoulder or worn like a rucksack by women who would thus have their hands free for knitting, was mainly used for carrying turf. Nor should we omit the wheel-barrow, both [493] box and turf types (Chapter 15 and Fig. 90), the hand barrow (for loads of stones and also for fish and nets) and the two-man turf creel (Fig. 91).

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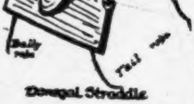
492 Side-creels are the panniers attached to an ass or small pony. Most of them are constructed with a hinged bottom so that the contents of turf, wrack, gravel or manure are automatically unloaded (Fig. 58). The sides are broken by ornamental " windows " which give a handhold for lifting and help to lighten the creel. Comparative study would reveal several regional and specialized forms of creel, and I have observed different methods of attachment even in neighbouring valleys. They are generally slung on wooden pegs driven into a roof-shaped crutch or straddle (Fig. 56) which rests on two straw mats. In the example figured from Tuam (Fig. 57) the straw mats are pegged together, and the straddle is strengthened by two osier ties, to one of which the tail-sugán is fastened. When hay or corn is being carried the creels may be dispensed with and the " bottles " or sheaves hung on the straddle pegs with an osier ring. Alternatively the creels are tied together with ropes which pass over a thick straw pad laid along the animal's spine, and the straddle is not used. The creels are D-shaped and can be made of openwork, for turf or wrack, or of closely-woven sides for manure. We shall have something more to say about their construction in Chapter 14.



Donegal Straddle
Fig. 56.

493 Among horse-drawn vehicles the sledge or slipe is very generally employed for transporting stones, manure, or turf and also for conveying the plough and harrows from one field to another. I illustrate the common slipe of Co. Antrim

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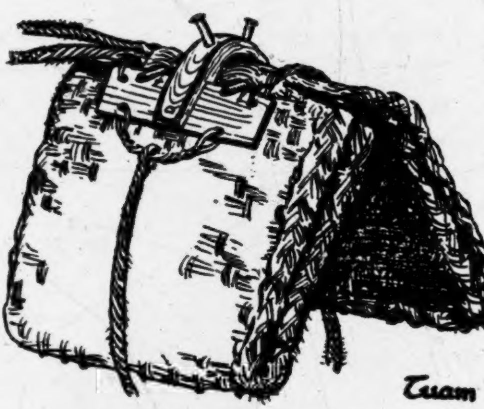

Straw pads & straddle for Creels

Fig. 57.

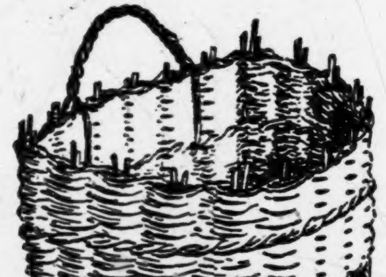
Tuam
Side
Creel

Fig. 58.

[p.107]

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493 (Fig. 59): the type used for drawing manure in Co. Down has the runners set close together so that it can be easily tipped over to empty. An even simpler sledge described as a "triangular framework" is said to have been used for dragging boulders out of fields. I have not seen this, but a similar "forked runner sledge" is known in Sweden.

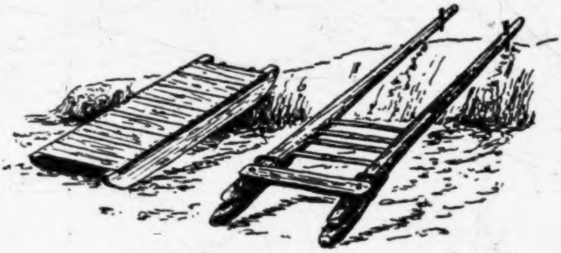

Fig. 59.

The slide-car (Fig. 59), now confined to a few hilly districts such as the Antrim Glens, was almost universal a century ago. It consists of two strong poles or shafts—bog timber was often used for the purpose—the ends of which slide on the ground. Attached to the ends by wooden pegs and an iron ring (called the "bowman") are short pieces of hardwood which take the wear and tear, though nowadays thin iron runners are often substituted. The shafts are tied together by cross-beams making a rough platform on which rests the wicker "kish," resembling the smaller creels but oval in shape, and like them, adapted to carry either turf or manure. For other loads such as hay or timber the kish is dispensed with. Although they will carry but small weights they can be taken on the roughest of moorland tracks and down slopes of incredible steepness.
492 The harness of the slide-car pony was until recent years
493 made entirely of wood and straw apart from a bit and halter for leading purposes. The straw collar (Chapter 14) was fitted with wooden hames attached to the shafts by short sugán

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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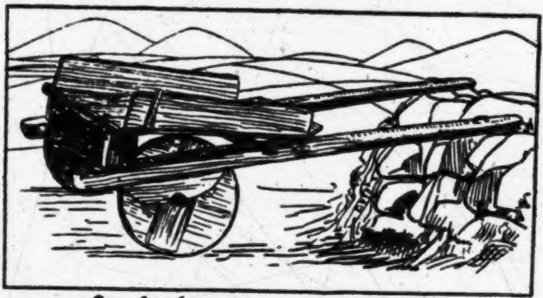
traces. The shafts were also tied by straw ropes to the pegs 492
of a straddle which rested on a back sugán secured in turn by 493
a tail rope of straw. Bridles and halters were sometimes made of horse hair.

The slide car, like so many of the Irish relics we are 171
considering, was found not long ago in the Scottish Highlands and is still used in central Wales. It is common in the Baltic lands and far afield through the mountain country of Europe and the Siberian tundra; and its wide and scattered distribution betokens its high antiquity. In general the slide car is employed for transporting hay and timber in mountain country; and it is of interest to find that in Sweden it is especially associated with the mountain dairies which are paralleled by the Irish booleys (Chapter 6). Scandinavian ethnologists have shown how areas which had the slide-car have become regions of the one-horse cart and have generally remained without the four-wheeled waggon. This applies with peculiar force to Ireland. (Pl. IV.)



[493]

Low-back car. *Mourne Mountains*

Fig. 60.

The older style of two-wheeled cart is that known as the 493
"wheel" or "low-back" car, which survives in the same environments as the slide-car. I illustrate an example from the Mourne Mountains, Co. Down (Fig. 60). The solid disc wheels lie under the body of the car and are fixed to an axle,

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493 now of iron but formerly of wood, that rotates with them. The wheels are so small—little more than two feet in diameter—that the floor of the car has to be raised up behind, and it carries such a small load that the number of horses in Ireland is said to have been considerably reduced when the spoke-wheeled cart took its place. In the 18th century " wheel-cars were used throughout the kingdom " in town and country alike: the Dublin " noddies " were of this type, and according to illustrations published in the early 18 hundreds the driver rode on the horse's rump. The low-backed car is now generally fitted with sides to make a " box car," but in former days it carried a kish of the kind used with the slide car. It should be noticed that until roads and tracks were [491] metalled—mostly within the last two centuries—the disc wheel had the advantage over the spoked wheel in soft loose ground. Even " superior farmers " in Donegal had only low-back cars as late as 1821, and we may repeat the statement made in Chapter 6 that there was " no wheel car " among a population of 8,000 in one Donegal parish in 1837. The slide [177] car and the creel did all the carrying. In the Glens of Antrim, too, the wheel-car was apparently something of a novelty about that time. An old man told me that his grandmother remembered the first car seen in her valley.

It must not be assumed from this that wheeled vehicles [401] were unknown in ancient Ireland: the literature suggests that they were in regular use but doubtless confined to the wealthier classes and districts. On analogy with other parts of north-western Europe the wheel was already known in Bronze Age Ireland. It is wrong to assume that the wheel was " invented " by the Irish peasants who adapted it to their slide cars. The disc and in turn the spoked wheel are ancient discoveries which came into use gradually as social conditions and road-making improved, and it was natural that the slide car should keep its form though lifted off the ground. Although we cannot accept the theory of local " evolution " for the spoke-wheeled cart, it is none the less clear that local experience controlled the details of its construction when it became

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popular, which was for the most part within the last hundred 493
years.

It may be suggested that the solid disc wheel influenced the shape of the spoked wheel, both in its narrow rim and small diameter and in the fact that it has very little " dish," and it cannot be denied that the slide car lives on in the structure of the modern cart. This consists essentially of two long " runners " which form in turn the front shafts, the side supports of the body and the back shafts or " trams." These projections are everywhere present and in some districts are as much as 3½ feet long. In its simplest form then, the cart is merely a flat platform resembling a slide-car on wheels, but it can be fitted with sides to make a " box-car," and this has become the standard shape in certain counties. It is now often fitted with old motor wheels and tyres to make a " soft car." Details of decorative work and styles of painting are [531]
markedly regional: in the Glens the body is blue and the wheels red: the front board of the cart has a lozenge design panelled or painted in red. Another subject which calls for [492]
investigation is the distribution and significance of horse-brasses and other trappings. They represent a very ancient tradition, as finds of the Early Iron Age demonstrate.

During the period of agricultural advancement in the 493
17-eighties several landlords introduced English waggons and 178
tried to popularize them for farm work, but they were soon abandoned; the one-horse car was found to be much better fitted to the soft roads. Small things, whether we consider vehicles, livestock, fields or villages, seem to characterize Ireland. Except in towns and for processional purposes the four-wheeled vehicle has no place here: we are in the " two-wheeled " culture region.

We may close this chapter with a few comments on roads 491
and tracks. Very little is known about ancient Irish roads, and although the use of chariots implies a knowledge of road-building one is inclined to be sceptical about the elaborate road system reputed to have existed in early Celtic times. To map these tracks without careful field-study is a popular but

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491 unprofitable pastime. The many old metalled roads running from town to town in direct Roman fashion seem to be military or post roads no more than a couple of centuries old. A few ridgeway tracks are certainly ancient, probably prehistoric, and they need studying in connexion with seasonal booleying routes. Some old timber roads have also been observed in or under the bogs, but in general it seems that the majority of existing roads and lanes were constructed to keep pace with the improvements of agriculture and means of transport, and to feed the single farms which resulted from the break-up of the village system. Any large-scale map will show the extraordinary pattern of narrow lanes which is required to supply the evenly scattered homesteads. An economist might calculate how much valuable agricultural land is wasted by this multiplicity of tracks, but the "loanin's" and "bohereens" are an intimate part of the rural scene whose value is not to be assessed in money, and it is at the "loan-ends" that the young folk assemble on summer evenings.

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER XIII.

SPADES.

412

184

[391]

The rich variety of the rural scene is perhaps best illustrated in that most characteristic of Irish implements, the spade. It is worth recalling that the spade-work of immigrant navvies—or "navigators," named after the canal-diggers—was one of Ireland's contributions to England's Industrial Revolution. A visit to city garden-plots will provide a useful introduction to the study of spades, for the countryman insists on his own pattern, and you may play the game of spotting the native heaths of Belfast's or Dublin's retired policemen by identifying the spades of Derry, Fermanagh, Cavan or Clare. Some idea of the variety of tastes catered for can be gained from the output of a Galway spade-factory: including turf spades (Chapter 15) it turns out about 150 shapes of blade.

Obviously it would require prolonged travel and study to record and interpret this fascinating diversity, and to compare the distribution of spade-types with landforms and territorial divisions, with dialects, folk-customs, house-types and other aspects of material culture. But it is possible to give some tentative generalisations which emerge from a preliminary study. The primary division is between the one-eared and the two-eared types (Fig. 61). The former, known as the "loy" or "fack," prevails along the western and southern coasts. It is now unknown in the Six Counties—though the "kib," as it was called, is remembered by a few old men—and is fast disappearing from Donegal and from the Midlands,

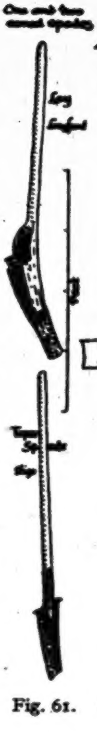

Fig. 61.

[p.113]

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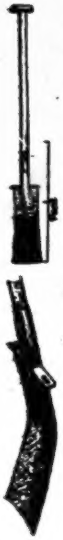
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

412
184

where its place has been taken by the two-eared spade; and it seems clear that the latter is the result of English influence, though in its Irish forms it differs considerably from the modern English spade.

These differences are no doubt adaptations to native taste and usage: they include the long straight handle, without hand-grip, the long narrow blade with its thick sides, the foot-plates, and the "lift" in the blade, that is the forward bend below the socket, which makes it enter the ground at an angle. North of the Boyne, however, the handle is shorter and is fitted with a crutch-end (Fig. 62), although there are certain "islands" of Irishry, such as the Mourne Mountains of Down, which cling to the long handle. Within the two-eared spade province there are many regional and even seasonal types of blade, for instance the Sligo-Roscommon area demands a long-bladed spade in spring and a shorter type in autumn, the length varying from 16 to 13 inches. In this spade the blade tapers, say from 5 inches at the shoulders to 3½ at the mouth; the Lurgan spade is a long variety familiar from the phrase: "a face as long as a Lurgan spade." While characterising the east coast and the Midlands the type spreads westwards to Sligo without, however, influencing Leitrim, which uses the loy, or Cavan, where the spade has an expanding edge, half an inch or more wider than the shoulders. A strong "cranked lift" of 6 inches (about 22°) is a feature of the Cavan spade, and of the Leenane spade in Galway. North Monaghan, Donegal and Fermanagh (Fig. 62) also use a spade with expanding edge and cranked lift. The taper spades, on the other hand, generally have a "round lift," that is the blade bends forward in a smooth curve, but both the degree of lift and the dish, that is the curve in the mouth, vary from one locality to another. Tyrone and Armagh have a spade which widens slightly towards the mouth but has a round lift instead of the cranked lift of Cavan and Fermanagh. A spade map would throw light on many aspects of rural history and geography, but these humble motters do not engage the attention of our educationalists.



The Fermanagh Spade.

Fig. 62.

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These two-eared spades are always attached to the haft 412
by means of straps about 6 inches long, generally with two 284
rivets: the foot-plates are fastened to the blade by mortice
and tenon and to the handle by a drawn-down tongue bent up
and nailed between the straps (Fig. 62). A visit to one of the 391
9 or 10 Irish spade "factories"—there were many more a few decades ago—provides a thrilling illustration of craftsmanship and co-ordination of labour. The five hundredweight tilt-hammer, driven by a water wheel, beats out the red steel in a series of operations under the skilled hand and eye of the spade-maker: between each process the steel must be reheated, and the interchange of the "moulds" and "plates" between furnace-man and hammer-man goes on without pause, for the "bit" of the hammer must not be allowed to strike without having the hot metal ready on the anvil. In addition to supplying his mate, the furnace-man has to bend over the "fullered mould" and weld and shape it on a small anvil: he must also apply sand and water to the plates if they get overheated, and dip the folded end in dust so that the two straps do not weld together under the hammer. After a period of ceaseless labour and watchfulness a pile of blue-grey drawn plates, their hammer grooves throwing back the glow of the furnace, lies ready for the finishing smith.

He shears them to the desired dimensions—all the
measuring is done by eye although there are dozens of different [804]
sizes—cuts out the tenons and punches the rivet holes. The points of the straps separate when the ends are clipped, and the socket is now opened up and shaped on a mandrel. Then comes the finishing: the plate is heated once more, hammered into the correct lift and dish, and tempered. Meanwhile lengths of rivets have been cut and the foot-plates drawn down: the ash handle is inserted and riveted, the straps hammered tight against the wood and the foot-plates morticed and nailed on. Four generations of experience lay behind the smith whom I watched recently in a Co. Antrim spade factory; the result was a product of exquisite proportions and economy of structure, the essentials of the country craft.

391 We must visit a factory in the south if we wish to see the
326 single-eared "Irish" spade being made. The country smith
412 may still forge or repair an occasional loy, but the trip-hammer does away with so much heavy sledging that most of the work is concentrated in the "factories." Yet, as the amazing variety of patterns demonstrates, there is no tendency towards specialization: the factory has merely taken over the work of dozens of rural smiths. Thus at least five different types of loy are used in Co. Galway alone. The blade may be straight sided, it may taper slightly or it may expand towards the mouth, and like the two-eared spade it may have a cranked or a round lift; but it is always narrow, ranging in width from 3½ to 5 inches. The loy is in fact a specialized implement, adapted for sod-cutting and ridge-making (Chapter 10); it is not designed to turn over dug soil, and like the two-eared spade which has taken over its functions in the north and east, it enters the ground at an angle and not vertically.

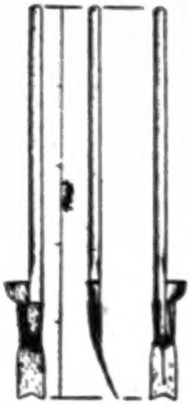
The Kerry "fack."

Fig. 63.

412 In the south-west, from Clare round to Kilkenny, the "fack" ends in a fish-tail, presumably to facilitate penetration (Fig. 63). In central Galway the loy has a 14 inch

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

blade with a slightly fish-tailed edge which is a little wider (5 inches) than the foot end (4½ inches): it has a cranked lift. In east Galway a similar loy is fitted with a curious two-piece haft: the foot-rest or "spade-tree" which goes into the socket of the blade is fastened to the stout ash shaft with iron bands (*cf.* Fig. 88). A similar loy was formerly used in Leix and other counties. In Limerick and Kerry the foot-piece is a small wedge pushed into the socket alongside the handle (Fig. 63). In parts of Galway and Mayo the foot-rest is carved out of a broad handle, and a variant of this is the loy of Cavan and Longford (Fig. 61), where the stout foot-rest is some distance above the socket and the handle is curved forward. In Clare, again, the handle bends backwards towards the user. 412

But loys of all shapes have long handles, about 4 feet in length, with no hand-grip. And they all take the handle in an open socket formed by bending the wings, which may or may not be further secured by nails, over the wood (Fig. 63). This method of hafting goes back to the prehistoric Iron Age in England. In Ireland, bill-hooks, axes and knives from crannogs and forts a thousand years old were hafted in this way, and though I am not aware of any ancient spades having been found in excavations, it is to the La Tène period (Chapter 4) that we should probably look for their origin. But until some attention and support are given to problems of cultural origins and evolution we are merely groping in the dark. Allowance must be made, therefore, for possible inaccuracies in the present account.

Loys of all types can be fitted with the ear or foot-rest on either side according to the practice of the locality or the individual user. Generally speaking, about eleven out of twelve loys are right footed, but towards the east the proportion of left-footed users increases, and as we reach the north-east, where, of course, the two-eared spade is universal, from one-half to two-thirds are left-footed diggers. Hence, presumably, the phrase applied in the north to those of the Roman Catholic faith: "they dig with the wrong foot."

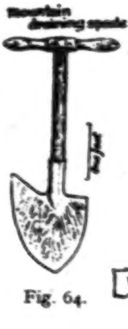

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Fig. 64.

[794]

412 While it is difficult to estimate the antiquity of the two-eared
184 spade tradition in Ulster and Leinster, its spread into the
west has taken place in the last half century. The decline in
the use of the loy is symbolic of the disappearance of the old
[178] fashions, and they tend to vanish together because the culture pattern is a closely interwoven web. Thus it was considered in Donegal a century ago that the new iron spades " would be useless," since few workers had shoes: the wooden spade was adapted to the bare feet.

391 The spade-maker is called on to turn out other types of
412 agricultural tools, spades, shovels and forks. There is the very narrow tapered draining spade and the heavy " mountain draining spade " used in the moorland areas of the north and west (Fig. 64): its great " shark's head " blade is 17 inches long and almost as wide. Occasionally he is asked to rough out a flachter (Fig. 85), which the country smith finishes into the required shape, or it may be, in the south-west, a graffan or heavy hoe (Chapter 10). But as the turf-cutting season comes round most of his energies go into the making of turf slanes (Chapter 15). Of shovels there are several different types, generally classified into two shapes, round-pointed and square-pointed: the latter kind is favoured in the west. There is also the tanged shovel of Co. Wexford. The shovels are long-handled, but short handles are used for special purposes. The welding of the socket in the thin hard steel of the shovels is one of the smith's most difficult tasks (Fig. 65).

412 Then there are short and long-handled square-shouldered digging forks with three or with four prongs (Fig. 65), and the round-shouldered manure-forks or graips, the prongs of which may be round, oval, or in old-fashioned work, square. There are drags for unloading manure, for gathering wrack (Fig. 103), for cleaning drains and gathering stones. Hay-forks may be tanged or strap-hafted, with 4-foot or 5-foot handles and so on. Some country-made forks are illustrated in Fig. 66. It may be added that hayforks with wooden prongs cut from the solid have also been used in the past. Some of the loys, like the old Ulster kib, are essentially wooden spades merely shod with iron, and even this was dispensed with in sandy soils. Wooden

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spades are said to have been used in Magilligan, Co. Derry, and in Mayo the forked-spade or "gowl-gob" is perhaps not entirely forgotten. It consisted of a wooden blade, with two prongs each some three inches wide shod with iron, and was employed for potato-digging in sandy or loose bog soils.

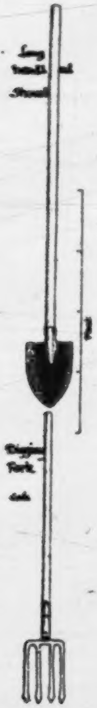
Long
handled
Shovel
Digging
fork

Fig. 65.

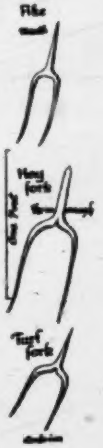
Pike
Hay
fork
Turf
fork

Fig. 66.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Aran Islands

Plate V.

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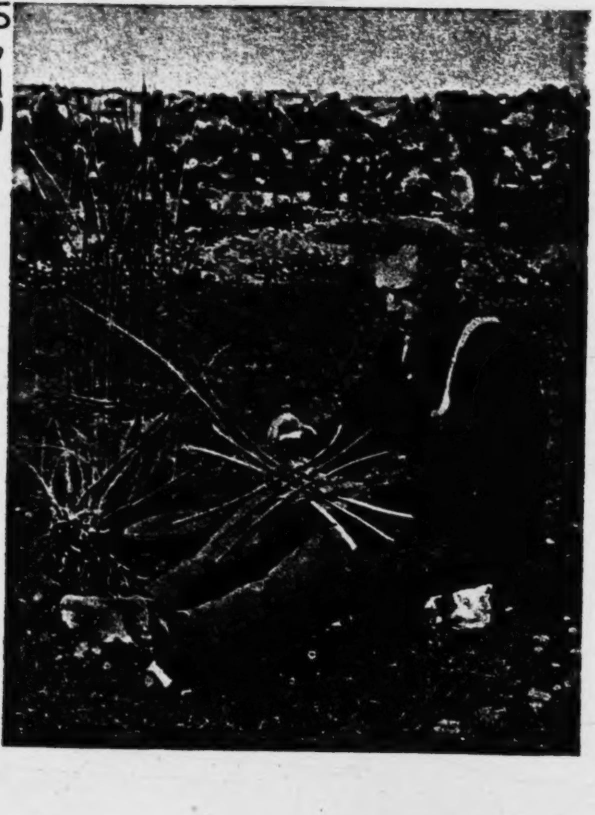

MAKING A SKIB

INISHERE, ARAN

CREEL IN GROUND BEHIND

[facing p. 121]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER XIV

WOOD, SKIN, STRAW AND RUSH WORK.

234

322 Many old-fashioned tools will be found lying around an old farmstead, some of them still used and others discarded but hoarded as is the way of the countryman. With some of these, generally dismissed in farm auction bills as "other objects too numerous to mention," we shall deal briefly in this chapter. Upright butter churns of oak are to be found in every county: they are made by the cooper and their construction is a specialized craft. I illustrate (Fig. 67) some varieties of churn and staff ("dasher" or "lonny"). They differ in size because the churns are "made to measure" according to the number of milking cows kept. One of the drawings shows the dash churn in cross-section: it should be added that the joins between the staves of the bottom are sealed with rushes. Ancient churns discovered in the bogs are generally cut out of the solid. They have a narrow neck and are provided with lugs for transport. Old accounts tell us that the dairymaid used to plunge in her arm to make the butter, and thus the dasher may be regarded as an implement developed directly from the human arm and hand. The staff was often worked by an arrangement of levers known as "glaiks," but this is rarely seen nowadays.

The full equipment of stave-built vessels supplied by the cooper included, besides the churn, the buttermilk butt and the cream butt or "keeler," the butter tub, the milk "can," into which the fresh milk was poured, and the piggin. Many

[p. 121]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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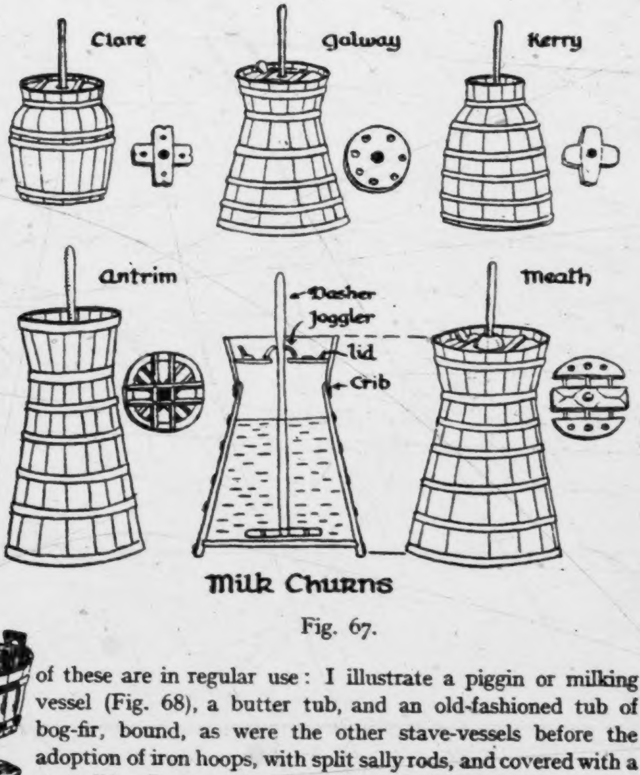

Milk Churns

Fig. 67.

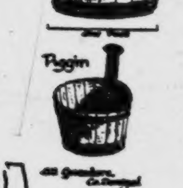

Fig. 68.

[415] of these are in regular use: I illustrate a piggin or milking vessel (Fig. 68), a butter tub, and an old-fashioned tub of bog-fir, bound, as were the other stave-vessels before the adoption of iron hoops, with split sally rods, and covered with a stone lid. Two smaller stave-built noggins for holding water, milk or porridge are also shown (Fig. 69), the Tyrone example being of oak with an ash wrapping, the Donegal specimen of bog-fir and sally bands. Passing mention must be made of wooden spoons and the handsomely carved butter stamps (Fig. 70). Wooden dishes, ladles (Fig. 70) skimmers and jogglers (Fig. 67) are made of sycamore and turned on the pole-lathe.

[281] Sieves of various kinds found a use in the dairy as well as in kitchen and barn. Among the exports from Ireland in

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former centuries animal hides and skins figured prominently, and it is not uncommon in the west to see cured skins of wild and domestic animals used as floor-coverings. No doubt in earlier days skins and furs were worn, but in modern times raw-hide has been employed only for shoes such as the "pampooties" worn by the Aran Islanders. These have the advantage that they do not damage the frail curraghs, just as the Islandman's headgear is the knitted Tam o' Shanter which the wind cannot blow off. A century ago one might have seen a dried sheep-skin serving as a window, or even a cowhide used as a door-hanging. Sheep- and goat-skins still find their uses as back-protectors (Chapter 16), in the making of thongs for flails, and especially in providing bottoms for various trays and sieves, the only difference between them being that the sieve-skin is perforated.

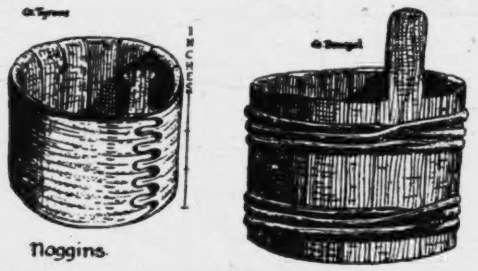
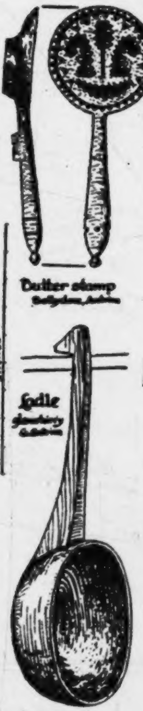


Fig. 69.



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[291]

[415]

Fig. 70.

The skin, scraped and dried, is wrapped or sewn on to a rim of ash or bog-fir (Fig. 71), and a good deal of skill is required to stretch it on without a wrinkle. These trays are called wights or wechts in the north-east: the peat wight is for carrying turf to the house and the corn wight for pouring corn into a sack. The winnowing tray sometimes has small perforations to allow the wind to pass through as the corn is shaken on to a cloth. A windy spot was selected for the purpose, and numerous "Shelling Hills" get their name from this operation. The perforations, about one-eighth of an inch

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281 across, are commonly arranged in patterns having, for example,
415 the maker's initials and the date left unpierced. A deeper tray used for carrying corn or for fruit-picking is known as a "dallan." Then there is the meal sieve, which has fine perforations, for sifting the coarse skins (meal seeds) from the oatmeal. Similar to this is the buttermilk sieve with which,
285 before the adoption of the hair sieve, the small particles of
415 butter were strained from the buttermilk. A milk-strainer made of birch bark folded into a cone and filled with straw is referred to in a 17th century account quoted by Mr. E. MacLysaght. In Tory, according to Mr. T. Mason, the wight is "composed simply of sheepskin with a twisted straw rope forming the rim."

The corn sieve, for getting out dust and dirt, and the corn riddle (Fig. 71), for separating bits of straw and "hairy tails," consist of interwoven splits of ash or bog-fir attached to a rim of the same material. The only difference between them is that the mesh of the former is one-eighth of an inch, of the latter perhaps ¼ inch, though it may vary for different kinds of grain. Efficient riddling is a difficult and nowadays rather rare art. I have not come across sieves of rushes or split willow, but it is very likely that they may be found.

[281]

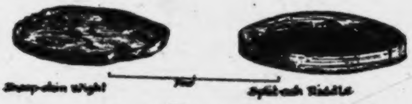

Fig. 71.

243 The corn riddle and the winnowing tray lead us back to
412 the thrashing floor in the barn. Here we will probably see a flail hanging on the wall. The sound of the flail is by no means rare in Ireland, for in outlying districts the small farmer has no other means of thrashing. The three parts of the flail are the helve or "hand-stave," a straight stick of any light wood such as ash or larch, the shorter and heavier swingel or beater, called in Ireland the "souple" (generally made of hazel, occasionally of holly or birch) and the flail-joint, hanging or
[284] "mid-kipple," which may be a sheep- or goat-skin thong, a

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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[284]

length of flax, or an eel skin. The methods of attaching the hanging to the hand-stave and souple vary, as will be seen from a random selection of drawings (Fig. 72). The joint shown in the Armagh flail (left), resembles a common English style, but it occurs as far west as Galway. Varied too, are the proportions between the component parts and the methods of swinging the flail. Thus in Antrim the souple is flung round the head while in Donegal it is kept to the side of the body. On fine days the thrashing may take place out of doors, but the usual place is " between doors " in the barn or even in the kitchen, for the opposite doors create a draught which carries away the dust. A besom of heather or of dried kale flower-stalks keeps the barn floor clean. [824]

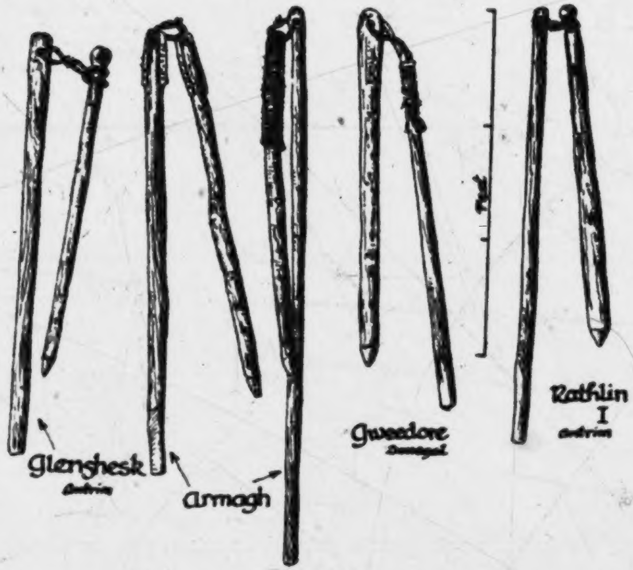

Fig. 72.

One of the most interesting and varied and probably one of the oldest crafts practised by countryfolk is the making of 285

285 baskets, and of creels and other objects of wickerwork. To do the subject justice would require a large volume, and we must confine ourselves to some broad aspects. We have referred to creels and kishes of various kinds in Chapter 12. These are objects which the countryman makes for himself, as distinct from the "fancy" basket work which is generally in the hands of special families. To take the creels first, they are constructed bottom-upwards in the same way as the framework of the Boyne curragh, by sticking the stout standards in the earth as though to make wattles and bending them over [824] to form the foundation of the bottom. Strong black sally, hazel or rowan are employed instead of the soft basket willows. The standards are left projecting above the rim of the creel when it is finished, so that the sides do not lift off. But a well woven "mouth" is also necessary to prevent slipping: it may be made single or double. Both creels and kishes may have windows in the sides (Chapter 12 and Fig. 58), an ornamental feature also found in the old wicker cradles. Creels and kishes may be loosely or tightly woven according to whether they are intended for turf or manure. Openwork creels are made in Co. Antrim by pegging the side rods into the two corner standards at intervals of about 4 inches. The old custom in Donegal is to repair two old creels and make two new ones each year. (*See Plate V.*)

285
227 Lobster-pots (Chapter 16), stock-pots, fruit and fish hampers, are made on a perforated wooden frame which may be regarded as a substitute for the earth, but most of the

[283]

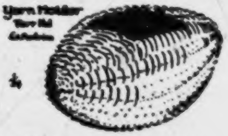

Fig. 73. Length 19".

285 "fancy work" is undertaken by specialized basket makers, and we can do no more than indicate the variety and skill of their products. There are certain localities where the tradition of basket-making is strong, for instance the shores of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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Lough Neagh—incidentally one of the oldest occupied areas in the country—the valley of the Suir and the Aran Islands. I illustrate a boat-shaped yarn-holder (Fig. 73) and also two types of "calf basket" (Fig. 74), which are tied over the calf's muzzle to prevent it from taking the cow's milk. (In north Antrim, as in Wales, I have seen instead a leather strap armed with nails which is fastened on in such a way that the nails prick the cow's udder). The calf basket recalls the Roman *corbis constricta* which prevented the plough oxen from cropping the vine shoots. In fine work the basket maker uses split rods which he prepares with a "cleaver." The example illustrated (Fig. 75) is made of cow's horn.

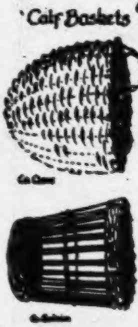

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Fig. 74.

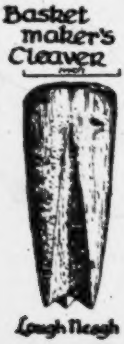

Fig. 75.

Then there are the shallow fish baskets, resembling the 285
potato-dish shown in Fig. 31, which the Galway fisherwomen 415
carry on their heads. In Limerick oval trays or "floats"
are used for hawking shell-fish or fruit: they are of various
sizes from 1 to 2 feet in length. Potato baskets (Fig. 54) and [482]
shallow baskets used in connection with wool-dyeing must be
mentioned, and I illustrate two kinds of linebasket (Fig. 76)
which, like the lobster pots (Fig. 104) are made by the fisher-
men. The tall apple-baskets used for picking fruit in the [184]
Armagh orchards taper down to a narrow base. On the other
hand the deep carrying-baskets of the Aran Islands are shaped [482]

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ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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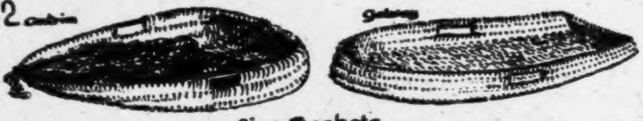

Fig. 76. Length *c.* 3 ft.

into a narrow mouth, a feature which is found in all Aran basket-work. Miss Gahan of the Irish Homespun Society regards it as an adaptation to the conditions on the islands, for the contents might easily be spilled owing to the number of loose stone walls which have to be crossed on a journey to the fields. Many of the Aran carrying baskets (" kishauns ") are constructed of coiled straw rope bound together with split bramble (Fig. 77). They no doubt help to keep warm the food carried in them, such as boiled potatoes, boiled in their skins needless to say, in the Irish fashion. Such " lipe-work " was once common in Wales, where seed-baskets, yarn-holders, hassocks and meal containers were made in this way, but in Ireland the only coiled work I have seen outside the Aran Islands is the bee-skep of rye straw, tied with bramble. The illustration shows the small bone pin or awl used by the islanders in threading the brambles. Similar pins, which doubtless had many uses, are frequently found in archæological excavations, particularly on sites where a Mesolithic heritage may be suspected.

[282]

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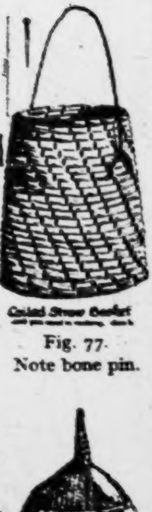

Fig. 77.
Note bone pin.

This brings us to the very large topic of the uses made of straw. There is no need to refer to the value of oat straw as fodder or as thatch, though it does not last long as roofing material, and either wheat or rye straw is preferred. A humble example of the use of thatch is shown in the beehive (Fig. 77*a*) Rope (sugán) made of straw or hay still finds many uses, especially for tying down thatch on houses and stacks. It is twisted on a " thraw-hook " of ash or hazel, with a sally hand-grip, but the old styles are declining with the spread of a simple " twister " of strong bent wire (Fig. 78). This type is found throughout the British Isles in many forms some of which are

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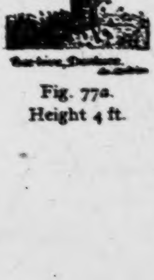

Fig. 77*a*.
Height 4 ft.

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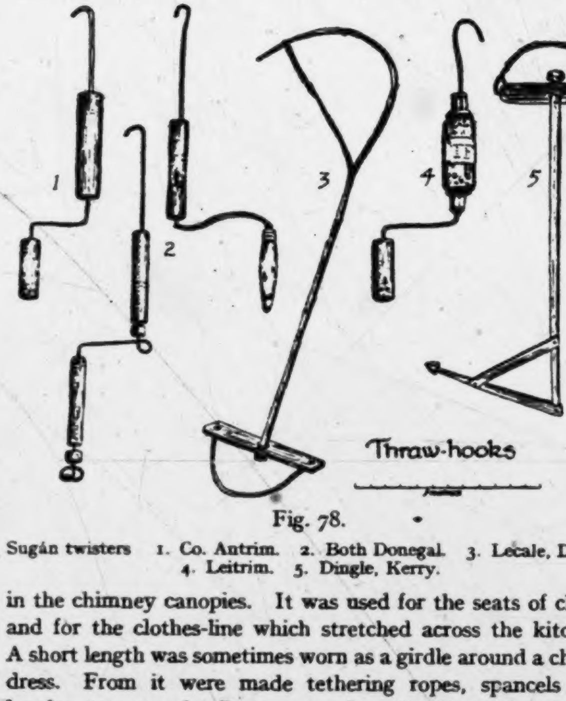
known to be of mediæval descent. The method of manufacture is shown in Fig. 50, and the tying down of a hay pike in Fig. 51. Sugán was sometimes employed instead of wattle 283



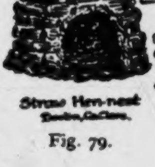
[413]

Fig. 78.

Sugán twisters 1. Co. Antrim. 2. Both Donegal. 3. Lecale, Down. 4. Leitrim. 5. Dingle, Kerry.

in the chimney canopies. It was used for the seats of chairs and for the clothes-line which stretched across the kitchen. A short length was sometimes worn as a girdle around a child's dress. From it were made tethering ropes, spancels and langles, traces and tail-ropes; and on the Donegal seaboard I have heard of cabbages being tethered "against the wind" by three hay-ropes! It is on record that the men of Mayo would descend the seacliffs suspended by a straw-rope.

A length of sugán is also the foundation course of many more complex objects of straw such as mats, mattresses, screens, beehives, nesting boxes, stools, arm-chairs, baskets and hampers. I illustrate (Fig. 79) one of the conical hen-nests which are hung on pegs in the kitchen: large



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[48I]
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Straw Hen-nest
Doolin, Co. Clare.

Fig. 79.

rectangular examples containing four nest-holes in two storeys are found in some districts, for example in Co. Longford. Though not easy to describe, the construction is quite simple once a start has been made. The finished objects have the appearance of being coiled. While some may have been made in this way, any that I have examined or watched under construction are plaited. The first stage is to twist a long sugán and double it into a two-ply rope, inserting between each third twist a small handful of straw known as a " tate." For the second row the tates are folded forward and plaited, the third rope being provided by the combined ends of the last tate. Handfuls of straw are inserted at regular intervals during the process, and the plaiting goes on until the desired shape and size are reached. The effect is shown in the hen-nest (Fig. 79). Straw collars for horses are made in a different way: some consist of two-ply ropes sown together with twine, but the type used with the Glens' slide-car is simpler (Plate IV).

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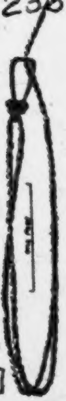

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[442]

Fig. 80.

Ropes of many kinds were in steady demand for tethering and spancelling, and it was the custom to prepare a good supply during the winter. Rushes were also used for the purpose, and they still meet a number of other needs such as bedding, thatching and flax-tying, apart from their old uses for toys, baskets, floor beds, rushlights and the ceremonial crosses to be discussed in Chapter 17. For making ropes the rushes were cut in late summer and beetled with a maul (or " mell "), then broken and twisted by hand so as to get rid of the pith. Dried in the sun and tied in bundles, they were stored until the dark days of winter, when they were fashioned into burden ropes and binnen-ropes (Chapters 9 & 12). The rushes were twisted by hand, first as single ropes, then in two ply: finally an eye was made at one end, and this end was strengthened by threading through another length of rope so as to make a plait. Spancels of rush rope were used to tie together the front legs of kicking cows, and horses were prevented from straying at nights by similar treatment. "Langles" and "burochs," tying together the side and the hind legs respectively, were other methods of hobbling. Straw ropes were commonly employed instead of rush ropes for hobbling,

[824]
[284]

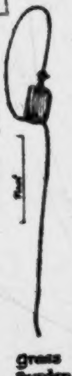

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Fig. 81.

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and similarly the cattle were fastened in the byre by ropes 231 of straw, as in Clare, or of horse-hair, as in Kerry. Of the 283 two burden ropes illustrated (Figs. 80, 81) the Donegal example is a two-ply rush rope with an eye made of a peeled stick bent into a loop: the Aran specimen is of grass (Manilla) rope [284] passing through a hole in a wooden runner. Similar blocks of wood serve as a swivel to prevent kinks in tethering ropes, separate lengths of rope passing through each hole.

Reference has been made to the fir-ropes used in securing 283 roofing scraws and thatch. Thin splits of straight-grained bog-fir about four feet long and an inch wide are twisted by hand into hollow cylinders, joined end to end to make a coil of about 50 feet. Two or three of these are twisted together to give the finished product, which combines great strength and elasticity with the capacity to stand up to all weathers. Fir-rope was often stretched across the wooden bed-frame to [352] make a springy mattress. A short " tie " of fir-rope is shown in Fig. 21, p. 63.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOG.

314 I have called this chapter " the Bog " rather than " Turf " because fuel is not the only product of the Irish turf bogs. The rough grazings once so important in mountain economy (Chapter 6) are commonly located on thin peat, while " buried treasure " is obtained in the form of bog-timber and also, it may be, in objects of wood or metal lost or deposited in the turf in ancient times. Measured by the time and labour of cutting, footing, stacking, and carrying, turf is an expensive fuel. At best, work in the bogs involves a constant struggle against water-logging underfoot and mists and rain overhead : at the worst there comes an occasional season wetter than usual when little or no turf can be won, and the bare countryside must be searched for sticks and rotting timber to burn. [237] In these circumstances dried cowdung is often used as fuel. [372] Moreover, the heavy drain upon all available hands comes in early summer, and the growing crops and livestock are liable to be neglected. " A great impediment to good husbandry," is the verdict of one writer.

The turf is cut in a normal year from the beginning of May onwards, or as soon as the potatoes and corn are in the ground, but the great thing is to begin as early as possible in [132] order to profit from the dry weather of spring. In districts where few crops are grown April, the driest month of the year, is the chosen time. A current of excitement runs through

[p. 133]

314 the homestead as preparations are made to visit the bog, which may lie at any distance up to some miles away. I fancy turf-cutting was one of the tasks undertaken in the old days by the young people who took the cattle to the booleys. It used to be a communal task, for instance in Donegal until lately [476] six or eight men with their women and child helpers would pool their labour, receiving their meals for the day from the owner of each successive bank to be cut. Similarly each man would take his burden-creel to assist in the communal gathering and stacking in July or August.

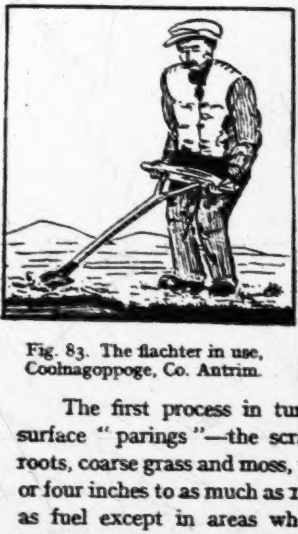

Fig. 83. The flachter in use, Coolnagoppoge, Co. Antrim.

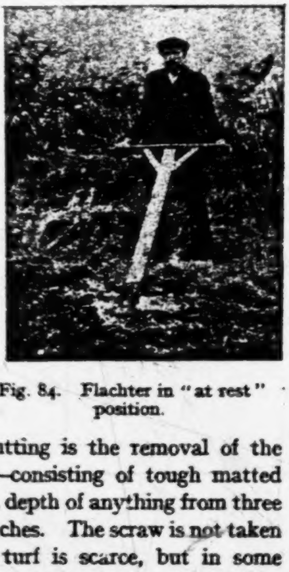

Fig. 84. Flachter in "at rest" position.

The first process in turf-cutting is the removal of the surface "parings"—the scraw—consisting of tough matted roots, coarse grass and moss, to a depth of anything from three or four inches to as much as 18 inches. The scraw is not taken as fuel except in areas where turf is scarce, but in some localities where the bogs have all been cut out, as in Rathlin and Tory, thin scraw scraped off the rock is the only fuel, and a very dirty and inefficient fire it makes. A broad spade is employed for paring, supplemented by some sharp cutting tool such as a hay-knife (Fig. 82), or an old scythe blade hafted and fitted with a foot-spur, for notching the vertical

[413]

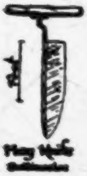

Fig. 82.

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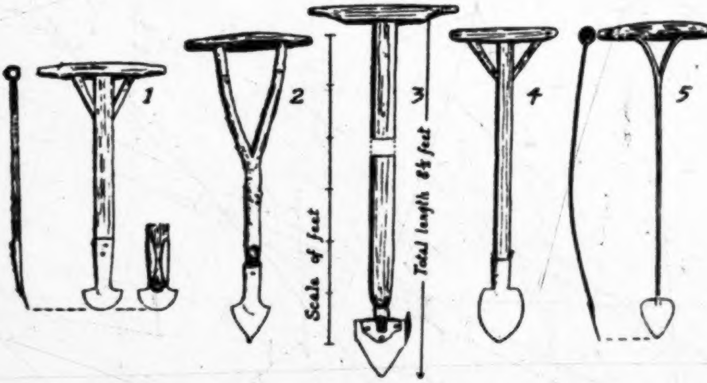
cuts. It is customary to replace the sod on the floor of the 3/4
bog as the face is cut back, so that the rough grazing is
preserved. If the sub-soil is suitable, lowland bogs are [311]
reclaimed and good cropping land secured for hay and potatoes. [/85]
In Armagh strawberries, raspberries, currants and rhubarb
grow excellently on the peaty soils.

In the mountain bogs of the north-east a variety of push plough known as the flachter—a word derived from the same root as "flay"—cuts off a scraw some six inches thick as it is driven by vigorous thrusts of the thighs against the stout cross-bar (Figs. 83, 84). Unlike the English breast-plough, the blade has no side wing. It is fastened to the shaft by the old-fashioned device of folded flanges which we have already come across in the sock of the wooden plough and in the loy. I illustrate in Fig. 85 some varieties of flachter and, for comparison, a breast-plough of English type from mid-Antrim (centre). In connexion with the short-



[413]

Fig. 85. Flachters.

1. Coolnagoppoge, Co. Antrim.
2. Glendun, Co. Antrim.
3. Glenravel, Co. Antrim (English type).
4. Co. Tyrone (1802).
5. Tirmeel, Co. Derry (iron shaft).

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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314 handled variety the story is told that on old turf-cutter at Coolnagoppoge, on seeing his first aeroplane pass overhead, reported that he had seen "the devil riding a flachter!"

314
413 The prepared turf bank may now be cut in one of two ways, either by "breasting" or by digging "underfoot." Different types of spade or "slane" are required according to which method is adopted, and within these two groups of slanes there is a multitude of regional styles and shapes. In breast-work the digger stands facing the turf bank, and thrusts in his spade horizontally, whereas in underfooting he stands on the bank and cuts vertically. Many factors enter into the distribution of these two digging-modes: the nature and grain of the peat, the depth of the face, and the local tradition. I have seen both methods used side by side on the same mountain, but I have also met foot-slanesmen who had never seen a breast-slane and vice-versa. In the thin mountain bogs the underfoot method is customary, while breasting is favoured in the deep lowland mosses. The turf slane is clearly a specialized version of the narrow loy, with the addition of a side wing to cut out the turf at one stroke. The old styles take the handle in bent-over flanges like the loy, but the new fashions of "factory" spade have borrowed the straps of the "English" digging spade (Fig. 86). Slanes were formerly made by the country smith, and the spade-factories which now forge them must cater for the demands and tastes of innumerable provinces of local culture which correspond, if one may hazard a guess, with old territorial units such as the baronies.

[391]

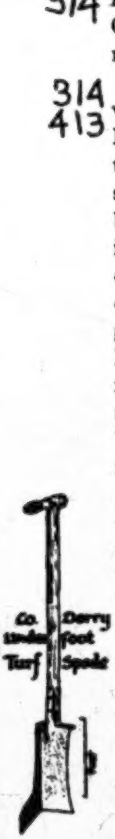

Fig. 86.

One factor in the varying shapes is the angle made by the cutting edge of the wing with the mouth of the blade: it may be at right-angles but is more likely to be set backward or forward at an angle which may be as much as 23°. In the breast-slane it tends to be set back (Fig. 89), while in the foot-slane it may be set forward at a sharp angle (Fig. 86). The edge of the wing measures anything from 4½ to 7 inches: the mouth of the spade averages 4½ inches but I have seen them up to 6 inches. Details vary so much, in fact, that to generalize is dangerous. The top or back of the wing is treated

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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in many different ways, for instance around Ballymoney it is hooked and the slanesman uses it to pull the turf-barrow into position. A foot-rest is provided on the foot-slane, on the side opposite the wing. There are left and right-footed workers, but it is not always necessary to use the foot, the strength of the arm sufficing. As with some of the loys (Chapter 13), there is a type of slane in the Midlands which has a separate spade-tree to which the handle is attached by two iron bands (Fig. 88). The spade-tree is of light wood, elm, or larch. Lightness is an essential quality in the slane: the blade is thin and sharp and weighs about 1½ pounds. The old type of 314 413

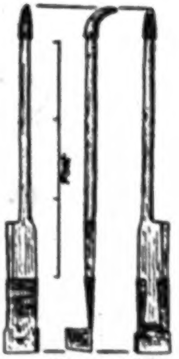

Fig. 87.

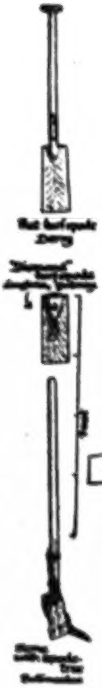

Fig. 88.

[237]

slane, like the loy, is straight handled, but it is customary to affix a cow's horn as hand-grip (Fig. 87.) Another type of handle is shown in Fig. 86.

Where the bogs are soft, especially in the area from Galway to Meath, a broad flat breast spade is employed in place of the winged slane. Its blade measures some 13 inches by 5 and it is sharpened at the sides as well as the mouth (Fig. 88). A Co. Derry variety has the edge expanded to 5¾ inches: its blade is slightly dished and has a gentle rounded lift. Details of this kind assist in the penetration and with-

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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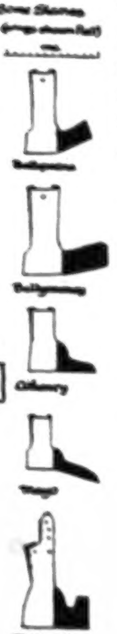
413

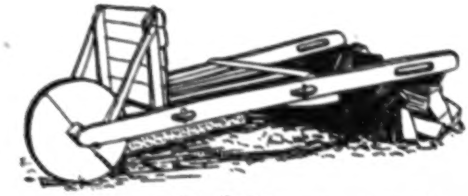
drawal of the blade, and the expanded socket acts in the same way. An interesting method of hafting is found in the "diamond" breast spade of East Galway (Fig. 88) in which the handle is fitted by soaking it to expand and grip the diamond-shaped perforations in the socket. The flat breast spade has to make two separate cuts before a turf is detached from the face. It has a short handle the length of which, about 2 ft., is adjusted to the length of the user's arm.

An experienced slanesman works with astonishing precision which recalls the steady ticking of a clock, his strong thrusts alternating with little jabs, designed to clean the edge of the spade, which remind the onlooker of the rhythmic anvil-tapping of the smith's hammer between his blows. Similarly the co-operation between slanesman, pitcher and spreader, or "holer," is a delightful thing to watch. But the work is hard and relentless. The severed turves may be placed directly on the barrow from the spade, or lifted off by hand two at a time and either loaded or pitched to a third hand who places them on the barrow. On deep



[493]

Fig. 89.
Top two are breast slanes.



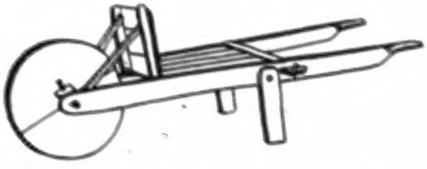


Fig. 90.

cuttings a long-handled graip is sometimes used, and the 314
smiths turned out special two-pronged pitching forks for the 413
purpose (Fig. 66). If the peat is soft a long-handled shovel is
employed instead. A barrow-load varies in capacity, for
instance it is 10 turves in parts of Antrim and 14 in Armagh. [493]
The difference depends on the dimensions of the turves as well
as the size of the barrow and the state of the bog surface:
turves range from about 22 inches by 4 by 5 to 10 inches by 4
by 3, but they shrink considerably as they dry.

The turf barrow is a low solid-wheeled archaic-looking 314
vehicle (Fig. 90) the details of its construction showing as 493
many adaptations to local conditions and traditions as the
slane itself. It is a compromise between two opposing needs—
a large wheel for ease of pushing over the rough bog surface
and a low chassis to facilitate loading and emptying, for the
barrow is merely tilted on one side by the spreader, the turves
slipping off and standing on end in serried rows to dry. The
barrow must be as light as possible: hence no iron is used in
its construction except for the axle-ends, and, perhaps, a
light tyre for the solid wheel or "trundle." In soft bogs the
trundle must be wide—as much as 5 inches—but three inches
is more usual. Its diameter ranges from 12 to 18 inches.
The legs of the barrow are always short and may be mere
lugs, or they may be absent, in which case there must be some
arrangement for enabling the handles to be gripped: they
are either perforated or upturned (Fig. 90). An interesting
variant which I have noticed around Athenry has the legs bent [492]
backwards in a curve to act as slides or runners. A curious
adaptation to soft bogland is recorded a century ago from Co. [481]
Mayo, where both horses and men were "shod with boards"
when working in the moss. Box-barrows are something used
to transport dried turf, or a "kish" may be placed on the
flat barrow. In Armagh "carrying baskets" are employed
(Fig. 91).

Little can be said here about the methods adopted to dry 314
the turf: the shapes and names of the various piles into which

3/4 the fuel is built differ from one area to another, and I give as a sample the list prepared by Mr. J. M. Mogey for Co. Antrim. After about a fortnight the spread turf is stacked in small "foots" formed by leaning a number of turves together, and later in "turn-foots" and "castles" which are built up in storeys. These are then combined into larger "rickles" or "clamps" and finally stored in "hand-stacks" erected alongside a bog road or in larger stacks built at the homestead (Fig. 93).

[482]
[285]

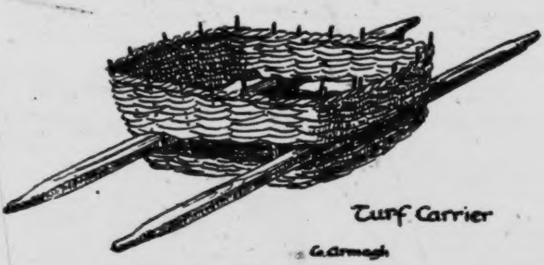


Fig. 91.

[413]

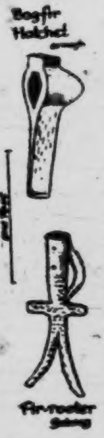


Fig. 92.

In many parts of the country the low-lying bogs are too wet to cut with the spade, and other methods of "winning" the turf must be adopted. Making "hand-turf" by moulding or "kneading" the black mud into balls is the simplest solution of the problem, but systematic methods have been evolved in some districts, and we give an account of the process as observed in Co. Meath, where mud turf is highly prized and considered to burn better and last longer than cut peat. It is dug in pits, broken down with short-handled shovels and graips and well mixed with water until the slushy mixture is ready to shovel into a box barrow, that is an ordinary manure barrow or a turf barrow fitted with sides. It is wheeled on to a smooth place and spread in a layer some 9 inches thick. When dry enough to take a man's weight the layer is notched in deep parallel grooves made with the edges of the hands, with cross grooves at intervals. The worker

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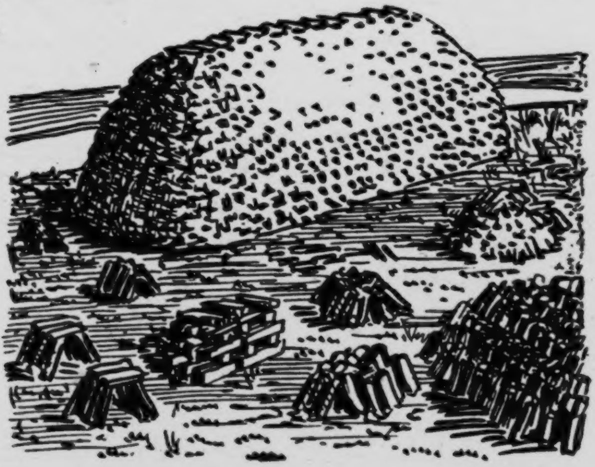
walks backwards, bare-footed, during this process of 314
"running," dipping his hands from time to time in a bucket of water to clean them. The great slab of notched turf then resembles a huge tray of treacle toffee. The brick-like slabs, some 12 inches by 4, are later cut out with a sharp flat turf spade or a hay-knife, and go through the usual processes of footing, clamping and stacking.



Turf stack, footings, castles, spread turf, etc. Co. Antrim.

Fig. 93.

We must now consider briefly the uses made of bog 313
timber, chiefly "fir" (Scots pine), oak and birch. The great [413]
fir stumps are cleaved with a heavy fir-hatchet, from 5 to as much as 14 pounds in weight (Fig. 92). A "lifter" of rather unusual type is also illustrated. The resinous wood makes excellent firing and kindling, but the toughest stumps defy the axe and their twisted roots make a convenient substitute for a gate or a stop-gap. Straight-grained fir was much in demand for making "splits," that is thin strips used for lighting purposes and for making the rims and bottoms of sieves.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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313 In the north long splits were twisted into fir-rope, a craft which is almost dead (Fig. 21 and Chapter 14). Both fir and oak were employed for constructional work of all kinds: old cabins will be found to be roofed with bog timber in most districts, and many implements, dressers, settles, stools, churns, tubs, slide-cars and even boats were fashioned from it. The buried trunks are located in winter by seeking frost-free patches on the bog-surface, or on summer mornings by noting where the dew lies thinnest. Their size and soundness are tested with an iron probing rod or "bog auger" and if satisfactory the trunks are then dug out.

491 Much might be said about the bog roads and means of access to the turf. In Armagh and Monaghan, to quote Mr. T. G. F. Paterson, the track or "car-path" by which the turf is carted home is called the "rampar" or "turf-pad," the rampar being the standing strip of bog preserved between cuttings. The various methods of tenure and rights of turbary are an interesting topic but a notorious source of trouble, and the Irish peasant finds ample opportunity for [69 1] indulging his litigious tastes in disputes over drainage and rights of way.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEASHORE.

The seashore, where the first Irishmen picked up a living 22
some thousands of years ago, still plays a significant role in
the islands and around the coasts and is laid under contribution
for seaweed and drift weed (wrack), for sand and gravel, and
for accessory supplies of food. On many an Irish strand too,
seasonal festivals, horse-racing and country games have only
slowly given way to holiday makers from the city. Communal
rights in the seashore were jealously guarded, and one
constantly comes across ancient customs that have survived
in this most changeless of environments. I recall the country-
man "on the brew" (bureau; that is, on the dole) whom I [283]
watched in County Down twisting on his bare thigh, his palm
dried with a dusting of wood-ash from the hearth, the two-ply
"crop" of horse-hair for his fishing line—each ply consisting
of twenty-one strands taken from the tail of a white mare.
This method of twisting is found amongst almost all primitive 227
peoples, and can be paralleled, for instance, from the remote 226
Andaman Islands. His outfit for codling fishing is illustrated
in Fig. 94, which shows two hair crops attached to a home-made
sinker of lead—called from its shape a "frog"; the use of
horse-hair has survived in this case because it is stiffer than
gut and serves to keep the hooks from fouling each other. [237]
Rock-fishing lines in Co. Antrim are sometimes made of black
horse-hair, but for the part next the hook, called the foot-line,
white hair is used. Well-made lines of carefully selected hair

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 144--ANALYST]

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226 227 are said to last a lifetime. I have seen such lines twisted between the palms of the hand and also made by spinning round a cap to which the two loose ends are pinned. In County Galway similar foot-lines are made of mixed horse and cow hair. The short lengths of hair cord are tied with a special knot (Fig. 94) which is "set" with saliva. Horse-hair cords were formerly used to fasten together the curragh framework in Donegal. [284] [827]

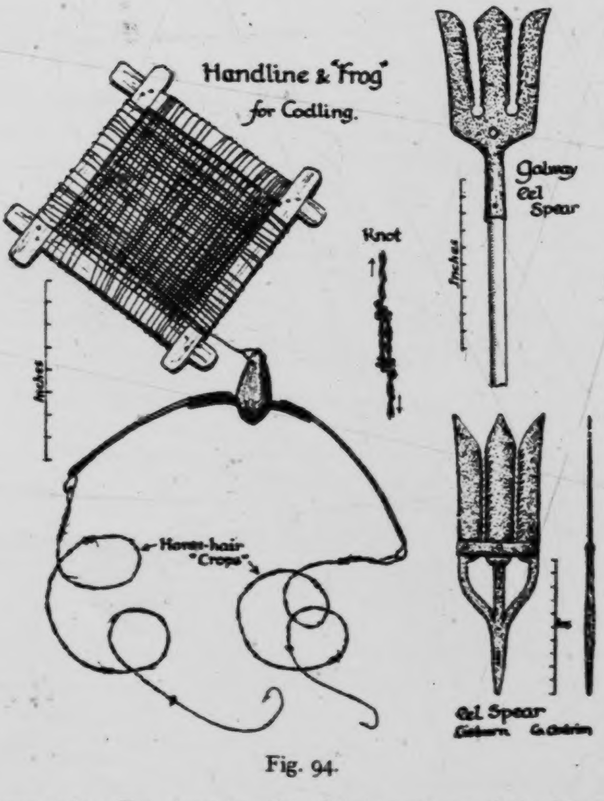
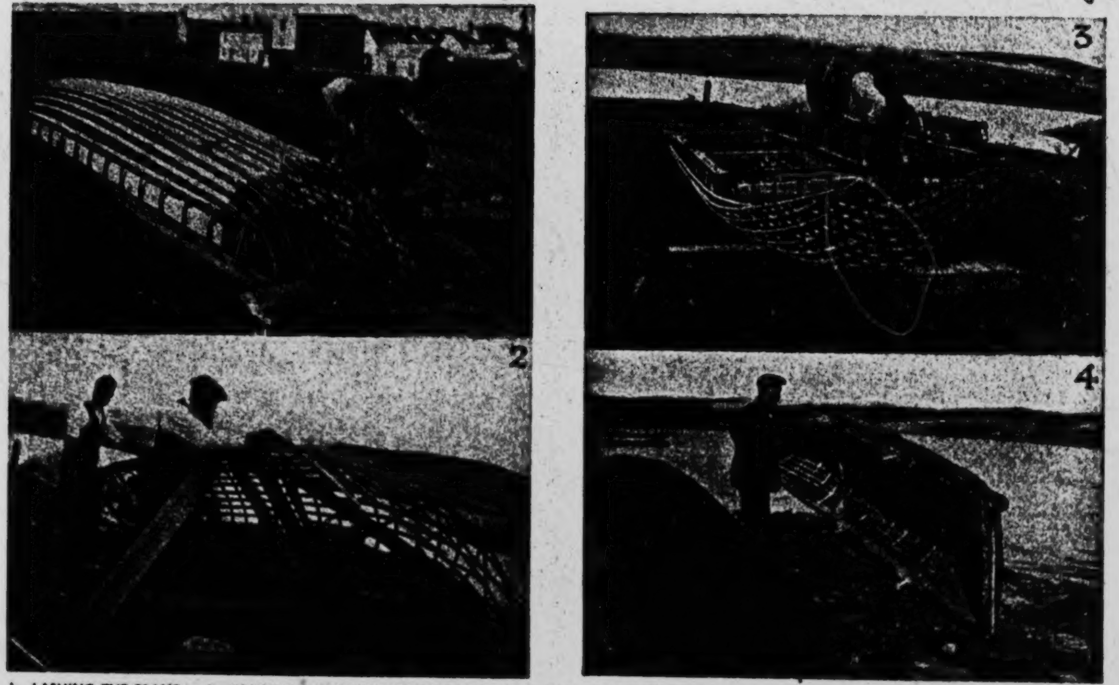

Handline & "Frog" for Codling.
Inches
Knot
Galway Eel Spear
Inches
Horse-hair "Crops"
Eel Spear
Glenarm Co. Antrim

Fig. 94.



1.—LASHING THE FRAME 2.—LASHING THE "BOW STRINGERS" 3.—FIXING COUPLE-ENDS TO THE GUNWALE 4.—COVERED AND READY FOR USE

Plate VI STAGES IN THE MAKING OF A SHEEPHAVEN CURRAGH, Co. Donegal.

[facing p.144]

226 Hazel sticks are often used as fishing rods, but the sea itself may cast up gifts in the shape of bamboo poles. In a general way each species of fish must be tempted with its appropriate bait or lure in its proper season, and when the varied traditions and fish of different stretches of coast are recalled it will be realized that a vast amount of information could be collected on this topic. The bait necessary for bottom fishing—mussels, limpets, "slaters," "buckies," crab, lug-worm and so on—is different from that used in 'streaming"—young eels, small fish, or artificial lures in the form of white feathers or hair.

Then there are the different methods employed in attaching the bait, in throwing the lines or using the rod both in rock and boat fishing. In Strangford Lough, County Down, for example, the rod is plunged deep into the water from the stern of the rowing-boat, the swirl of the current helping to agitate the streaming bait. An ingenious device found on the west coast is the "protected hook" used for fishing amongst sea-weeds: to prevent the fouling of the hook a shield made of the carapace of a crab is attached to the line. The stone sinker is made from a pebble by chipping out two notches to hold the line. Nor should we fail to mention that "the best hooks in the world" were formerly made at Limerick: the name is still attached to the graded hooks one buys in seaside towns.

In the north of Ireland the fish most commonly caught from the rocks or from small boats inshore is the dark coal-fish, variously called, according to its age and size, cudden or gelpin, pickock or pickies, glashan or blockan, grey lord,
[251] stanlock, black jack, and so on. Lightly salted, the split blockan may be seen drying on the thatched roofs of houses along many a stretch of coast. A close rival in popularity and abundance is the pollack or "lythe." Ling, one of our oldest foods, is still, like the salted herring which go so well
[251] with potatoes, a favourite in rural Ireland. They used to be dried beside the kelp kilns down the west coast. These

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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226 larger fish, including cod and skate, are generally caught on "long lines," hung with hundreds of hooks, in deeper water. The antiquity of some such method of fishing is suggested by the discovery of cod bones with the remains of our raised beach cultures. Old fashioned devices are found in long-line fishing, too: floats of inflated dog skin ("stookies") and sinkers of grooved stone (Fig. 95) are in daily use.

[227]

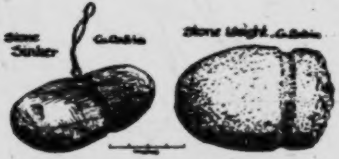

Fig. 95.

804 The illustration also shows a grooved stone resembling the type well known to archæologists as grooved hammer-stones. This example was employed as a 10 lb. weight for weighing wool. I have seen similar stones kept for weighing butter and kelp.

227 The line baskets present interesting variations of shape: I illustrate (Fig. 76) examples from Co. Antrim and from Co. Galway. The long Aran basket has a raised end, while the Waterford pattern is a short shallow basket. Types of net

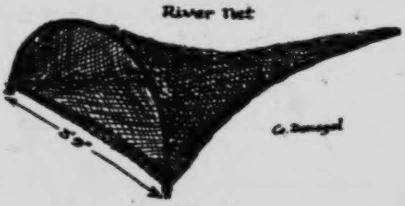

Fig. 96.

for inshore fishing, including salmon nets, differ considerably from place to place and need study. Mention should also be made of the "otter," better known from its adoption in mine-sweeping as the paravane, which is widely used for

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

netting in sea and lake and for poaching. And in this connexion one may whisper that the illegal eel-spear (Fig. 94), the leister or salmon spear, and the trout net (Fig. 96)[1] will sometimes be shown to the discreet inquirer. Old garden forks and shovels are often fashioned into spears by the smith. Resinous bog-fir sometimes provided the torches for "burning the river" in salmon-poaching. Much might be said of these dark practices, but this is not the place to give away all the secrets of the countryside. We may properly refer to the huge "legitimate" catches of eels in weirs such as those of "the fishy fruitful Bann." 227 [416]

501

The well-known curraghs of the Boyne and the west coast have recently been described in James Hornell's book, "British Coracles and Irish Curraghs," but details of rowing and sailing craft of all kinds should be recorded and sketched before regional types give way, as they are slowly doing, to standardised boats. It is probably not too much to say that every coastal county, every large river and lake, has its own traditional styles of vessels, and their comparative study would be an important contribution to science. Some of the small oval curraghs of the Boyne are still covered with cow-hide, but tarred canvas has taken its place in the larger sea-going curraghs of the west coast. These display many interesting variations according to local conditions and custom, but all, with the exception of the paddle curraghs of Tory Island, are fitted with single thole pins on which the oars swivel, the wooden pin passing through a hole in the heavy "bool" of the oar (Fig. 99). This curious device is employed also on some river and lake boats (e.g., the Corrib, the Shannon and Lough Neagh) and was until recent years found on the fishing boats of the Scotch Quarter at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. I have no information on the distribution of the single thole-pin oar outside Ireland, except that Mr. Hornell has reported (in a letter) that the method is used in the Sudan on the Nile. It is true of such ethnographical studies

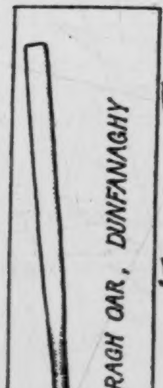

Fig. 99.

[824]

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[1] Similar poaching nets were made in the Hebrides—and probably also in Ireland—of heather stems and even sedge roots (*Carex flacca*).

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Donegal

501

[p.148]

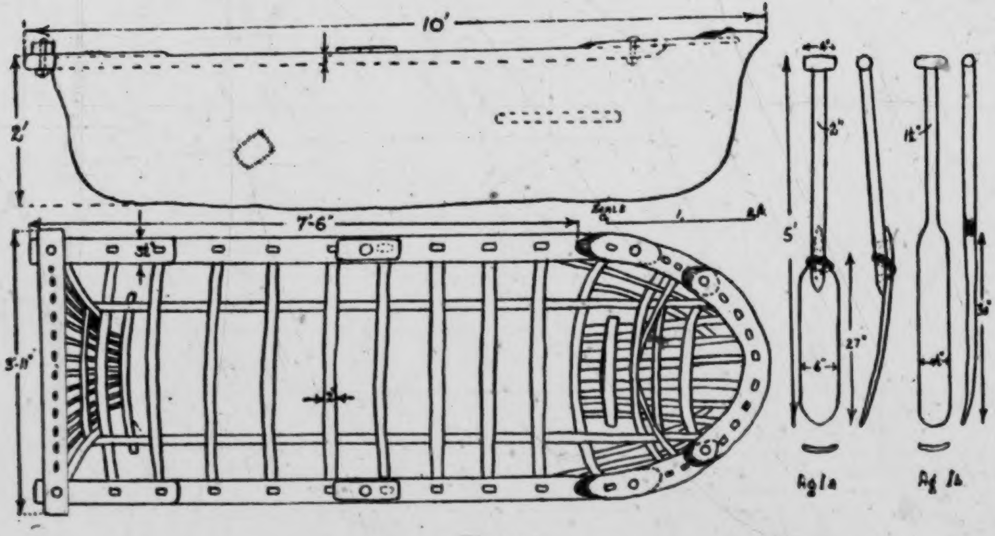

10'
2'
7'-6"
3'-11"
Scale
1
2ft
5'
2"
6"
27"
1½"
Fig 1a
Fig 1b

Fig. 97.
The Bunbeg paddle-curragh, Co. Donegal, with types of paddles, old and new.

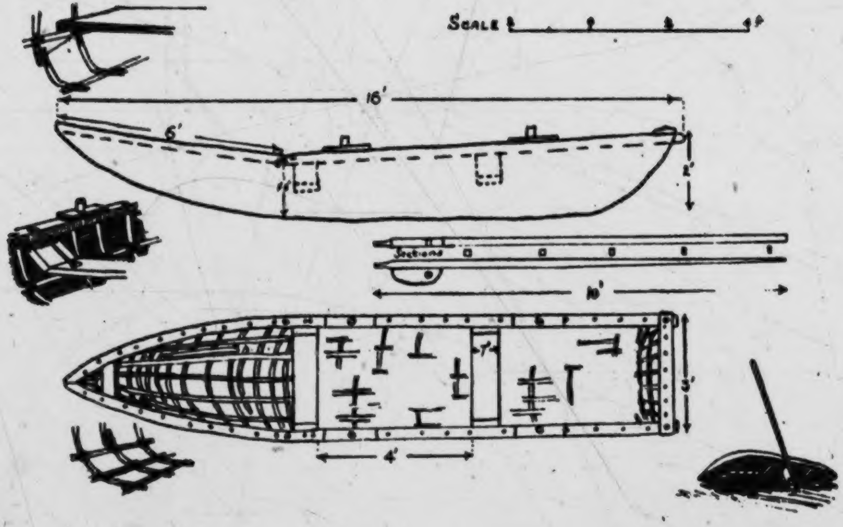

SCALE
16'
6'
2'
Sections
10'
4'
3'

Fig. 98. The rowing curragh of Sheephaven, Co. Donegal.

[p. 149]

as of other branches of the sciences of humanity that we know more of the ways of remote peoples of the world that we do of our own folk (Figs. 97 and 98, and Plate VI).

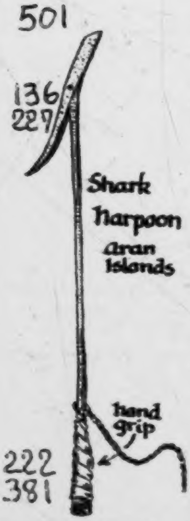
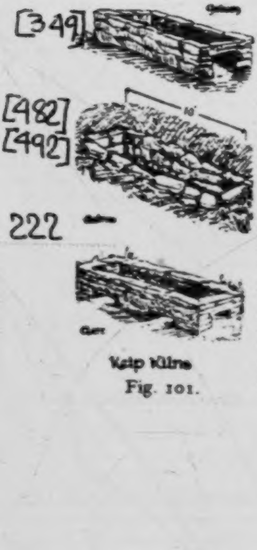


Fig. 100.
Total length 50"

Before leaving the sea and coming back to shore, brief reference must be made to some other sea-creatures which have contributed to the economy of the coasts. There is the basking shark of the Aran Islands pursued in curraghs and captured with a harpoon of the type shown in Figure 100. Seals, despite the many superstitions attaching to them, have been hunted for their skins; according to an old account the skins were made into covers for the oval curraghs of the Rosses in Donegal. It is recorded that seal-catchers in Co. Cork wore on their arms " bags quilted with charcoal." The seals when they bite are said to let go the hold when they hear the crunch of the charcoal.

Shore-collecting plays a varied if nowadays greatly reduced part in the life of coastal communities. The great days of kelp-burning, when the strong dense smoke drifted far inland, are no more, but this once flourishing industry has left its traces in half-ruined kelp-kilns (Fig. 101) and in various rusting hooks and drags (102, 103) which betray the keen rivalry shown in gathering the crop. The best weeds (tangle or " fyams," that is, *Laminaria*) were cut in deep water and their value was enhanced if they were free of sand. The men would sometimes have their knives and sickles fitted with handles as much as twenty feet long: women and children with back creels, assisted by donkeys or ponies with side-creels, did the carrying. In Aran the creel women protect their backs from the damp seaweed by wearing a goatskin.



Kelp Kilns
Fig. 101.

Carting or " drawing " the wrack for manuring the fields is still an active industry in spring on most Irish shores. The wrack is often carried some miles inland, and there are many stories of the contraband goods once smuggled from the coast under cover of loads of piled wrack. In Carlingford Lough, where the tides run high, wide stretches of foreshore are " planted " with rows of boulders in orderly fields called " plans." The bladderwrack which grows on the stones is

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

222

cut with toothed sickles in spring: as in parts of Connacht great rafts of cut seaweed, bound with a rope or with a sugán of wrack, are floated ashore on the flood tide. Seaweed is highly valued as a manure for potatoes on the sandy soils of low-lying coasts—"the potatoes are well-salted before they are gathered"—and it is said to swell the tubers so that they can be readily peeled by machinery. Since in addition the watery potatoes absorb little fat in frying, they are in great demand by the fish-and-chip shops: the export from south Down, for instance, goes largely to the mining districts of south Wales.

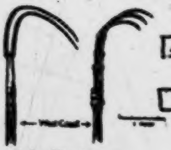


Fig. 102.

[413]
[244]
[439]

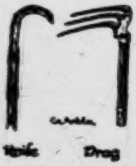


Fig. 103.
Scale as for Fig. 102.

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Some seaweeds are boiled and fed to cattle, other varieties are considered good for pigs, while several kinds are gathered for human consumption:—the strong-tasting dulse, dried and sold in sea-side shops and fairs, purple laver (sloke) and carrageen. I have no evidence for Ireland, but Pennant states that the goatherds of nearby Jura used to make cheese without salt, "lapped in tang and salted with the ashes of sea tang."

227
228
[439]

Shell-fish of many species—especially winkles—are gathered for home use and are exported in large quantities to England. Young and old may be seen gleaning among the stones at spring tides, and I have known large families who are almost wholly dependent on this ancient strand-collecting life. The larger shells such as mussels and scallops had a variety of uses in the home. Crabs and lobsters caught in rock-holes might be included here, but the "lobster-pot" gets most of this harvest of the sea. Several types of pot are in use. In the north the round-topped netted frame has gained ground generally, but the stronger wicker pots (Fig. 104) are retained for crabs and for trapping bait. In the west the old styles hold their own while a cylindrical variety, probably of French origin, is found on the south coast. Mr. Brian O'Kelly informs me that the lobster-fishermen of west Cork prefer the round wicker pot, but that the netted frame is used in the south-east in addition to the cylindrical variety. The netted frame differs from the type found in the north in that the entrance is on top or at one end instead of at the side.

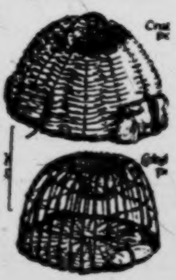

Fig. 104.
Upper, Antrim.
Lower, Kerry.

317 We referred in the first paragraph to sand and gravel: the white shell sand is taken for manure and is also strewn on the kitchen floor, while beach stones and gravel find many uses as cobble stones, pebble-dashing and so on. Among other 226 by-products of the sea we must not forget fish-oil, manu- 373 factured not only as a medicine for cattle but also as an illuminant. The iron crusie lamp (Fig. 105) was not long since the chief source of light in the islands, and until half a century ago large sea-shells are said to have been employed for the purpose in Co. Kerry. The wick of the crusie was a peeled rush or a twist of cotton: because of the strong smell the lamp was hung under the chimney so that the draught carried away the fumes. The abundant sea shells are also utilized for lime on some islands, for example Tory, by burning them in a kiln made of turf.

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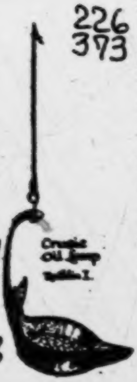

228

Fig. 105.
Length 15"

Finally, we must not omit the dread harvest of the sea cast up after storms—the timber and food-stuffs and wreckage—always welcome and perhaps in olden days not uninvited. Many an islandman's cabin is roofed with couples of ships' masts, and a visit to treeless Tory or Rathlin will reveal the many uses to which drift timber is put. Mysterious objects brought by the currents from the West Indies occasionally turn up: pumice, perhaps from this source, has been found, treasured no doubt as a magic stone, in sandhill settlements of 4,000 years ago.

162 It is not to be wondered at, when we consider the ancient 226 and varied, if often toilsome and dangerous life of the Irish shores, that the coasts carry a much denser population than districts inland. It should be stressed that these various activities are carried on not as a rule by specialized fishermen but by farmers and peasants to whom the sea offers an accessory source of life and interest, and who often perpetuate the old communal schemes by taking shares in a boat and nets. Old ways die hardest by the sea; prohibitions and super- [462] stitions are rife, and fishing is one of the few occupations in which women take no active part.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XVII

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS: THE COUNTRY TOWN.

Although the Celtic year began with All Hallows Day 221
(November 1st), for our purpose we may regard it as starting 796
on February 1st, or St. Bridget's Day. This was the first day 805
of Spring, and of field work, for the Saint promised that every [821]
second day thereafter would be hard and dry. The circle of [996]
the year ran its course through the seasons, punctuated by certain fixed festivals and by the uncertain advent of births, marriages, illness and death. It is with the fixed festivals that we are concerned in this chapter. The four seasons have their opening days on the first of February, May, August and November, and the celebration of these days and the preceding Eves is a pagan survival breaking through the Christian calendar. The festivals of February and of November have been taken under the special protection of the Church through their association with St. Bridget and All Saints, but many traces of the "elder faiths" of nature worship live on, sanctified by tradition if not always by the Church.

On St. Bridget's Eve (January 31st) it is customary for 221
country children to pull rushes—they must not be cut with a 796
knife—and take them home to be made into crosses by the 788
family gathered round the fire. A fixed ritual, varying from 285
one district to another, determines the procedure, and it traditionally included the St. Bridget's supper of pancakes or sowens taken from a plate laid on top of a rush cross. The

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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The
796 crosses, of various patterns, are hung up over doors and beds
988 and in the byre to bring good luck. Some of them are very
285 elaborate, but the oldest style, to judge from its Celtic form, is the three-legged cross (Fig. 106) which is specially associated
[777] with cattle and is not, like the other shapes, taken to church to be blessed, a ceremony which is kept up even in parts of Belfast. In the Glens of Antrim a small bed is fashioned out of rushes and placed by the fire on St. Bridget's Eve: the door is left unlatched so that the Saint may come in and rest.

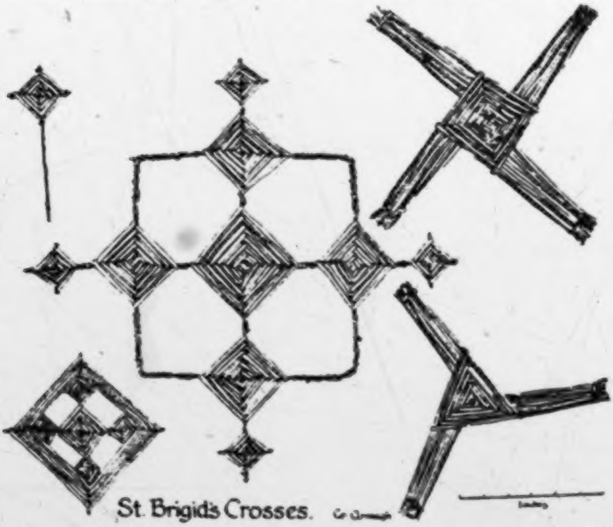
St. Brigid's Crosses.

Fig. 106.

In Co. Kerry young lads called "Biddy Boys" wear hats of straw on the first of February, and in other parts of the west, I am told, "Bridget Belts" of plaited straw are worn.

796
221 The next important day in the calendar comes about the middle of the three months of Spring, that is at the time now kept as a national holiday in North and South alike—St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. This is regarded as the proper time to commence sowing, and the countryman counts on

planting his first potatoes on that day, when St. Patrick 796
"turned the warm side of the stone uppermost." In the 221
Antrim Glens the hay meadows are closed on St. Patrick's Day, and under the rundale system the animals which had run through the townland from Hallowe'en were now carefully herded or driven to the rough grazing grounds so that they could not trespass on the unfenced cropland. A little later come the many memories of seed-time ritual and the spring sacrifice now represented in Easter egg-rolling games.

The May festival ranked next in importance to that of November: these are the major turning points of the year, where Nature decks herself in fresh green or in "rich Autumn's golden quittance." On the first days of these months the cattle were numbered, and it is a commonplace that these are still the rent or "gale days" in Ireland. On May Day the young crops were visited with torches and the cattle blessed before being driven to the mountain booleys, and hill-top fires played
a large part in the rites. These Beltane fires were originally [372]
need-fires, that is they were produced by the friction of two pieces of wood. All hearth fires were extinguished on May
Eve, and re-lit from the sacred fire. It is still a common [177]
superstition that it is unlucky to give away fire, even as light for a pipe, on May Day, for that would be to give away your luck for the year. In Donegal it is considered unlucky to be the first house to show smoke on May morn: the cattle are milked and the byres cleaned before the fire is made up. The Beltane ritual included the eating of oatcakes "which must not touch iron," and dancing three times clockwise round the fire. Many volumes could be written on the customs and superstitions connected with this festival, touching fire and food, salt and butter, the rowan and the flowers of the field, especially the marsh-marigold or May-flower. The city urchins have turned the celebrations into a prolonged parading of May Queens and collecting of pennies. See Chapter 19.

It is probable that fires continue to be lit on May eve in 372
some parts. Certainly the mid-Summer festival which 221
follows on St. John's Eve (June 23rd) still keeps its hold, for 796
then fires will be seen blazing on hilltops in almost every Irish

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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372 county. Originally they were intended, it is thought, to keep
796 the sun, now about to decline, on its course, but they also
221 played a part in the blessing of crops and animals. In Donegal until lately a burning turf was flung into each patch of growing corn. These and the other relics recorded are of course, not peculiar to Ireland: they are part of the common heritage of the ancient civilization of Eurasia. There is evidence that this festival was important also in fishing communities. The inhabitants of the Galway Claddagh, for instance, marched through the town in procession on St. John's Eve, "gaily dressed and miming, to the accompaniment of music; they collected money for merrymaking from the townspeople, and spent the evening dancing, drinking, and lighting bonfires in their own quarters."

796 The Lammas festival is nowadays particularly associated
221 with fairs, and the first of August, is referred to in Gaelic as "Lewy's Fair." But other traces of old custom survive. My colleague Dr. O'Brien tells me that in mid-Down, on the first Sunday in August, crowds of countryfolk assemble, accompanied by fiddlers, at the great prehistoric hill-top cairn on Slieve Croob. The "Criocan Thorn," in the heart of Slieve Bloom, is the scene of similar assemblies on the last Sunday in July. Here they dance to the pipes, and bilberries are eaten: the day is called "Fraochán (bilberry) Sunday."

So the year goes on its course to the culminating festival of All Hallows. We have touched on one of its former functions, the reunion of the family after the summer booleying, in Chapter 6. It is an occasion of reunion still: all Irish
[574] folk like to be at home on this date, which is in some ways the most significant of the year, for it corresponds with what was once the New Year. Fires were lighted to mark the end of the
[372] period of growth and to herald the new year. (In England the ceremonies have become assimilated to the Guy Fawkes celebrations on November 5th). As at Beltane, the Halloween fire used long ago to supply light to rekindle the domestic fire, which now serves as a substitute in the many games of divination played by the young at this time. Hazel-nuts, apples and other fruits of the autumn take an important place

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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in the combined pastimes of feasting and foretelling the future, 796
and cabbages figure in many an old game, for they are of 221
ancient lineage: the potato, barely three centuries introduced, has not displaced them in traditional ceremony. It is the young folks' day. Many of the games played turn upon the theme of identifying the future husband, and we shall see in the following chapters that match-making and marriage were among the functions of the great festivals, closely linked up with the magic of the earth's increase and the prosperity of crops and animals.

In parts of Ireland curious traditions attach to St. Martin's Eve (November 10th) and the feast on the following
day. A sheep or a fowl is ceremonially killed and its blood [782]
sprinkled in the corners of the house. No wheel must turn on the day of the festival. Finally there are the mid-winter celebrations, now marked by Christmas and New Year, which carry the year round towards St. Bridget's Eve. On St. Stephen's Day (December 26th) the hunting of the wren was formerly an occasion for general revel: it is now little more than a children's game.

We must conclude this chapter with some suggestions, 443
necessarily brief and tentative, as to the importance of these 527
seasonal gatherings in the social and commercial life of peasant Ireland. From very early times the major ritual assemblies of the year provided opportunity for exchange of goods, of livestock and of news, and for the maintenance of folk tradition and bardic skill. In ancient Ireland it is recorded that there were two kinds of assemblies, the "aonach" for pleasure and the "aireacht" for business, but it seems probable that, like the great fairs of recent times, they served both purposes. It is suggestive of the ritual and religious element in the old assemblies that they generally met upon hill-tops—often the sites of prehistoric burials—and that they took place at the fixed times marking the beginning of the Celtic seasons. May and November remain the favourite periods for country fairs, and the hiring fairs were always held at these times. A century ago the February and August fairs were also of considerable importance. The Old Lammas Fair

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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443 527 at Ballycastle, for instance, lasted a full week and though now limited to a single day is still the great event of the year in north Antrim. August and perhaps February were closely associated with the sale of sheep, the May and November fairs with cattle. In the early 19th century the great fair of Ballinasloe in Co. Galway handled as many as 20,000 cattle and 90,000 sheep. "Their whole thought," wrote Knight of the Mayo peasantry about that time, "seems to be going to fairs and selling or exchanging." "A yard of linen or a couple of chickens," says Arthur Young, "will carry an unemployed hand ten miles."

443 366 It is by the fairs and not by the calendar that the countryman dates events. It may be observed that the popularity of fairs, with their emphasis on livestock, illustrates the strength of the pastoral tradition. They have been something of an obstacle to good husbandry because they occur at the changes of the seasons and thus interfere with field work, particularly with harvest. Nowadays most of the fairs are associated with urban settlements, but the name "Fair *Hill*" still clings to the streets where they are held, and many a town has its fair hill just outside. On such sites tents were formerly erected for refreshment, and there are certain old fair grounds now abandoned where you may see the grassy foundations of the huts and the fire holes where the giant cauldrons were boiled. In the ancient aireachts streets of booths were set up for the fair period, so that they might be described as temporary towns. Professor MacNeill has put forward the thesis that these were the "cities" named by Ptolemy in his description of Ireland.

369 361 This brings us to the problem of urban origins. It is perhaps true to say that the fair used to be regarded as the product of the town, but recent research supports the view that the fair precedes the town and was one factor in its rise. Apart from comparative evidence drawn from certain north African communities, for instance, anyone who has watched a small town on fair day must get the impression that he is looking at something which has been going on throughout the

ages. He sees the country taking complete possession of the town, blocking its streets, ignoring its traffic: he is in the presence of a force older and more fundamental than the town which has given it hospitality (Fig. 110).

When we inquire into the origins and antiquity of the Irish towns we find that very few go back to pre-Norman times, while it is abundantly clear that periodic gatherings in " temporary towns " are far older. The pre-Christian fortress-palaces such as Tara and Navan did not survive into historic times, and as a rule the church in Celtic lands had no civic interests, though many a confiscated monastic site was revived as the nucleus of a town when occupied by English troops in the 16th century. Some coastal cities such as Dublin and Waterford were founded by Norsemen, but most of the inland towns grew up as castle-market-towns during the Anglo-Norman period or in the plantations of the 16th and 17th centuries. To-day the five chief seaports, none of them strictly " native," contain one quarter of the total population: very few inland towns have more than 10,000 people, and only one of these is outside the industrial Six Counties. Most of the fair centres have a population of from 500 to 5,000: there are 187 towns of this size in Eire. There are 202 " towns " with from 200 to 500 inhabitants and only 25 with more than 5,000 (Fig. 107).

It is to these small towns, scattered at convenient intervals of 10 or 15 miles up and down the country, that the fairs have been attracted, the centre of authority and administration becoming the centre of exchange. Although most of the settlements are of " foreign " origin, they have become thoroughly Irish. The family system and blood-ties link up town and country, and trade follows the personal bond of " friendship," that is, blood relationship, however remote. Over shops and inns it is family names one sees painted up: O'Flynn and Flanagan take the place of the English " General Stores " and " Red Lion." Since the countryman's money comes only at the periodic fairs, he relies on the shopkeeper's credit, and the debt must never be entirely paid off, for that

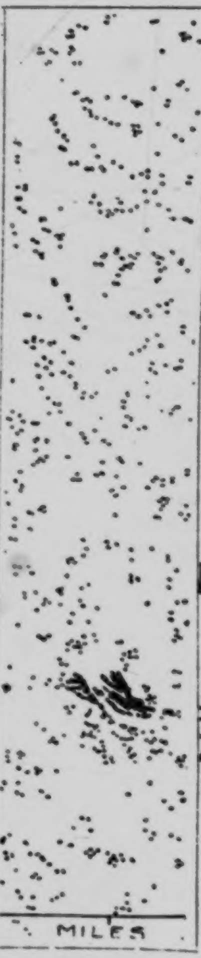

Fig. 107.
A market town with scattered country population. Each dot represents a building.

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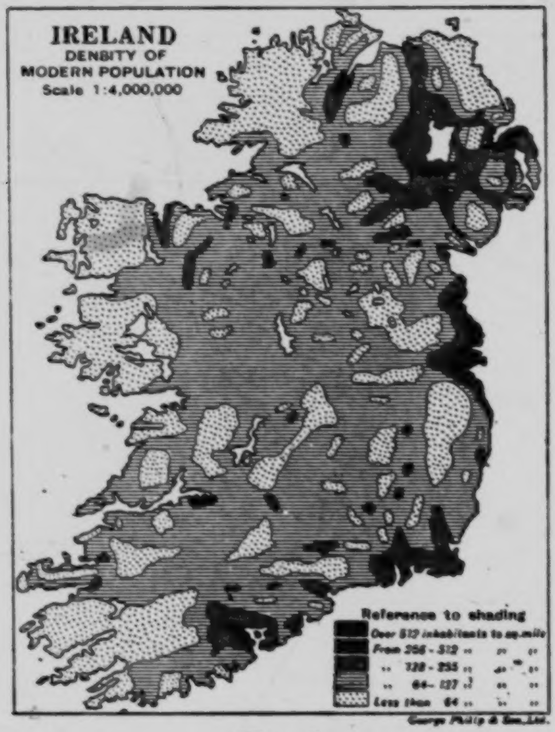
361 [369] [443] would "spoil" social relations. Even in the larger towns the shopkeeper is reluctant to have his bills completely settled by his customers. These personal ties readily give rise to cliques and municipal corruption: it must be admitted that the corporate spirit is poorly developed. Similarly the Irish country town is generally lacking in any native traditions of [344] civic architecture, and even the splendid buildings of Dublin and Galway together with the distinctive court-houses of smaller towns owe much to outside influence. The small

[162]


IRELAND
DENSITY OF
MODERN POPULATION
Scale 1:4,000,000
Reference to shading
Over 512 inhabitants to sq. mile
From 256 - 512 ,, ,, ,,
,, 128 - 255 ,, ,, ,,
,, 64 - 127 ,, ,, ,,
Less than 64 ,, ,, ,,

George Philip & Son Ltd.

Fig. 108.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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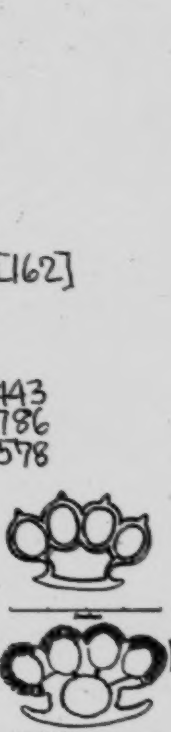
The small
town consists of streets of houses of peasant style strung 361
end to end, picturesque with their washes of many colours, but [364]
perpetuating and even accentuating the filth which can be tolerated in a village setting of streams and fields but which becomes highly objectionable under urban conditions. On the other hand there are some spaciously-planned country towns which have an air of quiet opulence reminding one of the English heritage to which they owe their foundation. I am aware that in saying this I am ignoring the " inner flame " of the Irish towns, but it cannot be denied that externally they have much to learn from the older civic traditions of the sister isle. Dr. Arensberg has analysed the pattern of the country town and described it as " an extension townwards of the countryman's own social order." He shows that, until recent times, its economy has been that of distribution, not production. Banks and pubs and shops do most of the business and owing to the family system " Ireland is better supplied with shops, at least in number, than any comparable European nation." If we exclude the Lough Neagh basin, [162]
all the denser areas of population are coastal and most of the country's manufacturing industries are concentrated in the ports (Fig. 108).

To return to the fair, we have tried to show how the 443
periodic gatherings in which they originated were associated 786
with ritual and emotional experiences connected with the 578
celebration of recurring events such as seed-time and harvest. Breaking the routine of toil, it is characteristic that much licence was permitted on these occasions. Until recent times a strong spirit of revelry and a temporary slackening of the moral code distinguished the great Irish fairs. Even to-day the police or civic guards make allowances for fair day and turn a blind eye to many offences against the law : it is recognized as a time of special licence. Games, dancing and faction fights were the order of the day once the buying and selling were over. Until a generation ago cruel "knuckle-dusters " (Fig. 109) were carried in readiness, and the countryman's heavy felt hat was worn as a defence against the
blackthorn Shillelagh.



[411]

Knuckle-Dusters [illegible]

Fig. 109.

443 blackthorn shillelagh. Trailing the long coat or "trusty"
786 was a recognized invitation for a fight.

578 To the onlooker it appears as though the business of selling is itself in the nature of a fight, such are the hearty and
443 resounding slappings of open hands up and down the street. Then follows the prolonged argument, the cut and thrust of keen bargainers in a circle of interested onlookers, over the amount of "luck money" to be given back to the seller. It is an age-old ritual far removed from the mechanical sale of a pen of cattle at an auction. The establishment of auction sales and latterly of marketing boards not only undermines the business of the country town, but threatens to destroy the intricate fabric which binds together a thousand homesteads in the intercourse of fair day. It is a sad commentary on rural development that in recent years "dole-days" have brought as many people to town as "fair-days."

[493]

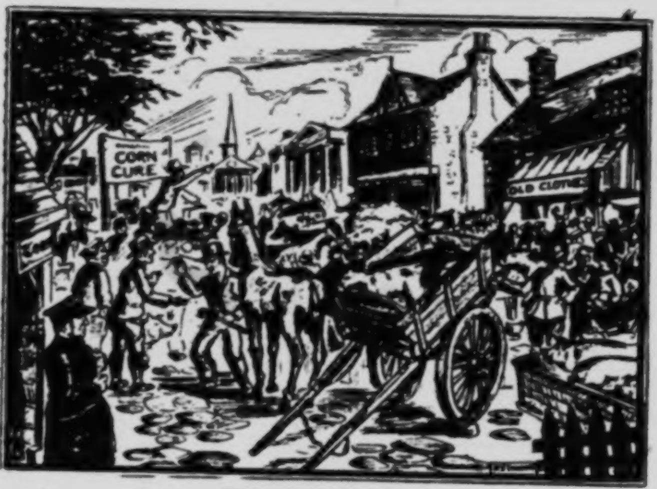


Fig. 110. Fair Day.
A bargain is being struck on the left.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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CHAPTER XVIII

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. I.

With the many material survivals from the past which 771
we have mentioned in earlier chapters there lives on an
imposing body of customs and superstitious beliefs of which
we can attempt to give no more than a summary description.
They concern not only the visible world with its common
elements and events—water, fire, stones, salt, iron, trees,
cattle, crops, harvest, food and drink, birth, marriage and
death—and the relics of former ages—raths or "forths,"
great stone monuments, stone axes, flint arrowheads, spinning
whorls and "crocks of gold"—but also the unseen or rarely
glimpsed world of giants, fairies and other beings. All the
major processes of the farmer's year had their appropriate
magic rites which clung to them from the beginning. Many
of these superstitions are so deep-rooted that centuries of
opposition from the Christian Church have failed to suppress
them, and while it has driven some practices into secrecy it
has been forced to take others under its protection.

This applies, for instance, to the cult of holy wells, which 312
is, like the worship of stones and the veneration of thorn trees, 788
probably megalithic in origin and seems to carry us back to 755
the sunnier lands of the Mediterranean where the megalithic
religion took its rise. It has been calculated that there are 778
some 3,000 holy wells in Ireland: many of them are still
visited, generally at the festival seasons which we described
in the last chapter, and it is customary for the devotees to tie

312 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which
788 often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments.
955 I happened to come across a well near Cork just after mid-
summer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains
778 of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve.
The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors
[825] looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live there and to show itself only to the cured.

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease, lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness The first Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish. Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district. Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have megalithic connexions.

788 The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions
823 concerning the great stone monuments with which they are
778 often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

Archæology (July, 1940) by I. R. Crozier and L. C. Rea, 788
entitled "Bullauns and other Basin-stones," summarizes the 823
various beliefs connected with cup-holes and the larger 778
"bullauns" or stone basins, which the authors suggest were made in the same way by gradual ceremonial attrition. The water which accumulates in these artificial hollows is considered to possess special virtues, for instance as a cure for warts, and offerings of pins and coins are often made in them. It is significant that some of the basins seem to have served as fonts in the early churches. (Fig. 111.) Small boulders 754

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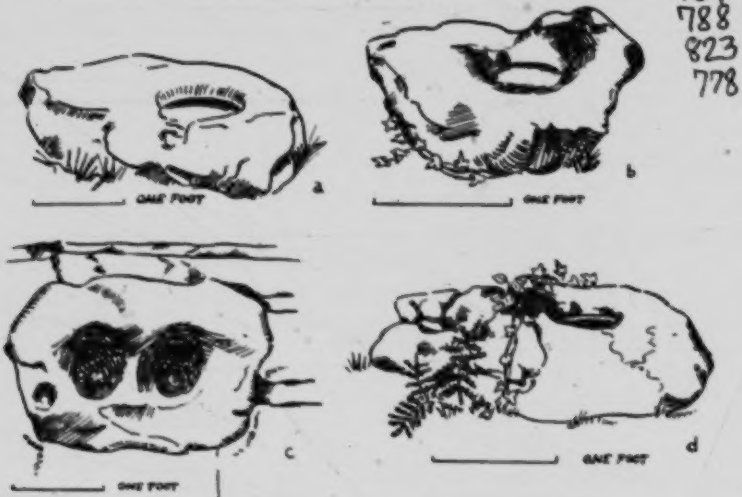

Fig. 111. Bullauns.

(*a*) Portmore Church, Co. Antrim.
(*b* & *d*) Aghalee, Co. Antrim (basins on both sides of the same stone).
(*c*) "St. Columba's Font," Londonderry. (Two bullauns and a cup-mark.

lying in certain basin-stones are occasionally employed as cursing stones, the ritual consisting of turning the stones against the sun in their holes—there may be as many as ten in one boulder—at the same time uttering a curse against the offending Person,

788 offending person. Similar stones have been used to work
823 beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the
778 symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there
are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic
magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom,
that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various
concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the
[755] grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for
human sins or for disease in cattle.

829 The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in
776 veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The
same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance
[778] some holy wells have "healing stones" which are used to
touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with
a perforation ("holed-stones") are said to have been used in
sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the
haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be
regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and
awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it
is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient
peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that
belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country:
I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a
protection against fairy theft, for the "wee people" are
liable to exchange their "changelings" for healthy boys—a
[165] belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high
mortality of male as compared with female children.

764 It has more than once been my experience to be refused
[777] permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the
owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people
will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for
instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This
reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a
charitable explanation of the neglect from which many
Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth
[824] remarking that archæologists have often shown by their
discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

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able part in the ceremonies of megalithic burial : we remember 764
the significance attached to hazel nuts in the Hallowe'en games 824
of divination (Chapter 7).

The ancient raths or forths, earthen enclosures around old 776
homesteads, are also favourite haunts of fairies, and many 789
are the tales of mysterious happenings in their neighbourhood 829
at night, and of signs of habitation and sweet music issuing
from them. Protection from fairies is believed to be obtained 778
by possession of a black-hafted knife, while oatmeal or oatcakes are also specifics against their malign influence. From fairies as from witches the supreme hour of peril to mortals is at the eves of Beltane, Midsummer and All Hallows. Cattle afflicted with disease were believed to be "elf-shot"—the belief is not entirely dead—and flint arrowheads were produced as proof of the attack. The cure was to give the affected animal a drink of the water in which the arrow had been placed. Among other archæological relics the polished stone axes of the Neolithic and Bronze ages are known as thunderbolts and are accredited with healing powers, and the small spinning-whorls are termed fairy mill-stones. As Arthur Mitchell writes of Scotland : "It is believed that stone celts assist the birth of children ; that they increase the milk of cows ; that they cure the diseases of the eye ; that they protect the houses in which they are kept from lightning ; and that they have many other such marvellous virtues. It is believed that, as they have a sort of supernatural origin, they may reasonably be supposed to have supernatural powers."

When food is taken out of doors it is a common belief that 776
some must be left behind for the fairies, otherwise the dreaded 789
"hungry grass" will grow ; and the countryman will often spill a portion of his drink as a perhaps unconscious libation to the wee folk. Their activities are peculiarly dangerous to cattle and to butter-making. Among the charms designed to
secure a good supply of butter in the churn we find the use of [751]
a horse-shoe, of a rusty nail from a coffin or the hand of a
corpse, of rowan branches, salt, a live turf, or a cross made of
verbena leaves.

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776 veronica leaves. In the North it is considered unlucky for a
789 person to enter a house where churning is taking place without
[777] "giving a brash," that is lending a hand at the churn-staff.
In the words of a countryman in the west, "Queer things do happen to butter." Fairy tales are full of cattle and cattle-stealing: so are the epic tales. Writers of last century tell of cows that might be seen "with rags about their horns as a charm against the gentry," or gentle-folk, a name often applied to the fairies.

824 This brings us to the fairy or gentry thorns, skeaghs, or lone bushes, that is the solitary whitethorn trees which are regarded with dread. These trees, which must be counted by the thousand, are said "never to have been planted but to have grown of their own accord." They may be found on ancient monuments or alongside holy wells but the great majority are scattered through the fields, and it is worthy of notice that the cult is at least as strong in the Protestant north-east as in other parts of the country. A venerable thorn, pink-flowering, stands under my window as I write and casts its shadow into the Senate Room of the University. But no one will remove it or even lop its branches, and the story goes that when the buildings were being erected, the plans had to be changed in order that the thorn should not be interfered with. If a lone tree surrounded by half a dozen scientific departments has claimed such respect it can be imagined in what awe the country thorns are held! See Tailpiece.

It has recently been suggested that the veneration of thorn trees was a Belgic custom introduced to Ireland some 2,000 years ago, but it seems more likely that as with sacred stones and wells we should look even further away in time and space to Mediterranean origins and regard the cult of trees as part of the nature worship connected with man's first use of the Irish soil. Certain thorns dedicated to Irish saints figure also
[764] in ceremonies of burial: when funerals pass by they halt and
stones are placed beside the thorn until they have become cairns. Wayside cairns, in the form of memorial monuments,

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Wayside cairns in the form of memorial monuments 824
line the roads to the graveyards of Aran. On thorns at cross
roads it is the custom in Co. Wexford to hang small crosses, [211]
made of coffin wood, as the funeral procession passes by. [764]

We cannot deal at any length with the superstitious 764
practices which cling so tenaciously to death and burial:
they recall the customs of many other regions, such as
Brittany, where the old megalithic cult was strong and seems
to have lived on in obsessions about death and accompanying
notions of re-birth. The anxiety to be buried with relatives
reminds us of the strength of the blood-tie, and " bestows
even on death a feeling of social interest." It is an Irish belief
that the dead live on in the graveyard, and that the last
person buried acts as servant to the others, a belief which not
long ago led to disputes as to which of two bodies to be
buried should be interred first. There are certain old graveyards
where women only are said to be buried, and no living
woman will enter them. On Innishmurray there are separate
graveyards for men and women. Unbaptised infants were [766]
generally interred in special burial grounds, some of which
appear to be prehistoric cairns. There is no need to add to the
many accounts that have been written of the keening of the
dead and of wakes. In connexion with wakes we need only
refer to the tricks, pastimes and games which were their
accompaniment. The dramatic games were known under
such titles as " The Walls of Troy," " Short Castle," " Building
the Ship," " Turning the Spit," " Selling the Pig," " Building
the Fort," " The Horse Fair," " The Mock Marriage " and
" Shuffle the Brogue." While some seem to have been for
amusement only, in others it is difficult not to see sex-symbolism
and fertility-rites. In recent times the wake-games [786]
have often degenerated into licence and drinking. Maria
Edgeworth tells us that " more matches were made at wakes
than at weddings."

When going to a funeral it was customary, in parts of the west until the beginning of the present century, to carry some salt in the pocket in order to avert evil influences. Arensberg quotes the belief that " there is never a funeral but the other

764 people are at it, too, walking along behind." In the Aran
Islands, as we saw in Chapter 7, the corpse was carried out
through the back door, and the front doors of all houses
were closed as the funeral passed by. In Co. Mayo the coffin
was carried three times round the church, sunwise, and pipes
[982] filled with tobacco were left, presumably as offerings, on the
grave. To prevent the spirit returning to the house of the
living, it used to be thought necessary to apply a " lick " of
whitewash around the door and window openings. The
association of white stones and white shells with graves is
[822] probably another prehistoric survival. Many of the megalithic
cairns were covered with white quartz stones. It often
happens that old superstitions and customs survive under the
guise of children's games, and we shall have something to say
about toys and games in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XIX

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. II.

Shrove Tuesday or " Shraft " was not long ago the great 584
day for weddings in rural Ireland. In older times it seems 585
certain that marriages were celebrated at the seasonal
festivals described in Chapter 17. An interesting account
of the ceremonies in the barony of Upper Fews, Co. Armagh, [114]
was written down in 1818 and has been printed in a pamphlet
published by the Dundalgan Press in 1923. It relates how
" the courtship of the parties often commences and is carried
on at fairs and patrons, and at wakes and funerals, from
whence they run away together, that is, the male brings the
female, sometimes by force, to one of his friends house."
It goes on to describe the negotiations between the two
families and the fixing of the bride's portion or dowry. On 585
the wedding day the two parties, consisting of from 20 to 40
relations, contend, on horseback or afoot, " for who will be
at the bride's house first ; where, when the parties arrive, the
bridegroom and bride are presented with a plate of oatmeal
and salt, of which each of them takes three small mouthfulls.
After this the parties mount their horses and join in one
grand cavalcade to the alehouse and then to the priest.
Whichever of the new married couple first rises after the
nuptial benediction will, it is considered, live longest."

Following another visit to the alehouse the parties separate and " scamper away towards the bride's house,

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585 whilst numbers of people are collected on the hills and eminences to behold this race for the bottle. The first person to reach the bride's house is victorious; he is rewarded with a bottle (? of poteen) which is drunk by the company and then broken by the bridegroom. Next " a cake of oatmeal or flour, called the bride's cake, is broken over the bride's head, and is greedily seized upon by young persons present for the purpose of placing a portion of it under their pillow. Another scene of noisy festivity then commences, which often terminates in riot and bloodshed between the different parties."

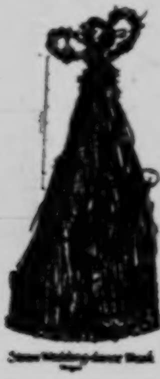

Fig. 112.

585
532 A wedding custom recorded within the last 50 years from Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Kerry was the wearing of straw masks by "straw-boys" or "soppers," who went about begging money and drink and threatening mischief. The styles of mask varied from one district to another: we illustrate (Fig. 112) the pattern worn in Mayo. It is hardly necessary to add that parallels to this kind of ceremonial dress and mime can be found in many parts of the world. Among the practices connected with childbirth attention has been
846 drawn to survivals of the "couvade," whereby the husband is supposed to share the woman's pains. It is stated that in

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It is stated that in

Mayo a ploughman would be called in to shake a woman at a 845
difficult childbirth, presumably because it is he who prepares the ground and shakes the seed which brings new life to the fields.

Music, dancing, games and dramatic performances also 536
played their part in the seasonal gatherings, and one may 527
hazard the guess that the Irishman's passion for betting 796
derives from this source. A ritual element, as in the wake 842
games mentioned in the previous chapter, can often be detected, for example in the following account taken from the source quoted above. It describes a May game or pantomime from the Louth-Armagh border, modified survivals of which were current through most of the 19th century in the Slieve Gullion district. "On May day the figure of a female is made up, fixed upon a short pole and dressed in a fantastic manner, with flowers, ribbons, etc. This figure they call 'The May Baby.' Around it a man and woman (generally his wife) dressed also fantastically with straw, dance to the sound of a fiddle and entertain the people with indecent shows and postures, the figure at the same time being kept moving by the rustic maiden that supports it. These exhibitions cause great merriment among the assembled populace; women who have had no children also attend (some of them from a considerable distance) to see this figure and exhibition, which they imagine will promote fruitfulness in them, and cause them to have children. Money is collected, and when the actors and musician have received some remuneration the remainder is laid out in drink, and the evening passes by jovially." This magic pantomime was originally intended to secure the success of the year's crops.

Such rites and gatherings have gradually been suppressed 517
or won over by the Church; and Sunday evening is now the 526
favourite recreation time for dancing and games. Among the older games, hurley is most popular, and horse-racing has by no means lost its appeal although it has suffered like other amusements from commercial exploitation. On many a

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517 sea-strand, hurley, horse-racing and games have drawn
526 together large crowds at certain seasons of the year, and in summer there were also boat or curragh races. These have by no means lost their appeal: one may instance the gatherings at Omey Island, Co. Mayo. If bull-baiting, doubtless a relic of ceremonial bull-fights, is now dead, cock-fighting is still secretly indulged in, while the illegal "long bullets,"[1] played with a heavy ball along the roads of Co. Armagh and Co. Cork—a curious distribution, for I have not come across it elsewhere—is still popular, and though Wakefield seems to attribute it to English influence it recalls the skill of the Irish peasantry in stone-throwing. This was, legend tells us, one of the playful habits of the giants of old, and a phrase used of the Aran Islands—"quarrels usually end in stone-throwing"—would not be inapplicable to some Irish cities during the "troubles." In the Claddagh of Galway a favourite amusement, turned at times into its original use as "a mode of warfare," used to be casting stones with slings. "When a man was able to strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot." O'Curry states that it was the custom of the ancient Irish to use a flat circular stone in warfare: it was carried in the hollow of the shield.

526 Games which have kept their seasonal character are still played at Hallowe'en, especially that known as "diving for apples." "Riding and shoeing the wooden mare" is perhaps no longer played, but we must repeat that it is rarely safe to speak of old customs as extinct in rural Ireland. It has more than once been my experience to come across habits and beliefs which were described as dead half a century ago. Certain
534 toys should also find a place in this brief summary: there is,
524 for instance, the "bull-roarer," a thin lath of wood with serrated edges which is swung round on a string so as to

---

[1] An interesting account of bullet throwing is given by Michael J. Murphy in *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*, 1941, p. 78. Both iron and stone bullets were home-made, and the writer describes how the latter were fashioned in "bullet-holes" resembling the ancient cup-marks mentioned above on p. 164. The game was also played round Dunleer, Co. Louth, fifty years ago, but in the Cork style, that is by overhand "bowling."

produce a buzzing noise. The toy is known in Co. Carlow as 534
a "whee-doodle" and in Co. Down, where it seems formerly 524
to have been regarded as a "sacred" thing, as a "boomer." Professor Haddon has described specimens from Co. Antrim and Co. Cork. About the Co. Carlow example in the Dublin Museum Dr. Raftery provides me with the following note. [777] "A boy was whirling it around and an old man who saw him was very angry and told him to take the thing home and burn it, as otherwise he would bring bad luck on the countryside." This was in 1921. I illustrate a "bull-roarer" from Cape Clear, Co. Cork (Fig. 113). Its Irish name is Cláirín Búirthe.

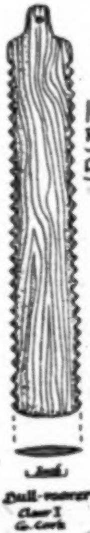

Fig. 113.

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534

It is, of course, possible that some Irish localities may have learnt the use of this toy from stray specimens brought home from regions where it is still in regular ceremonial use, but when we remember all the other Irish survivals we cannot doubt that the bull-roarer is a relic of the past that has lost, or nearly lost, its sacred character. The bull-roarer has an almost world-wide distribution. It is said to have been employed in ancient Greece in connexion with the Dionysiac mysteries. We can imagine its employment in the initiation rites and magical practices of pagan times so picturesquely reconstructed by Professor Macalister in his book "Ancient Ireland." In various parts of the modern world the bull-roarer is used as a rain charm, in raising a wind or producing thunder, in driving game, herding cattle (*cf.* Chapter 6) or preparing for fishing, in rites of initiation and circumcision, in funeral festivities and mask dances: it is a general rule that the instrument must not be seen by women or children on pain of death. In the words of Haddon: "This insignificant toy is perhaps the most ancient, widely spread and sacred religious symbol in the world."

Of great antiquity and wide distribution, the spear- 171
thrower is another instrument which appears to have survived 524
in Ireland as a toy, used as a throwing stick in boys' games. [411]
And another toy "not yet connected with any ceremonial usage" but paralleled among the Chinese and the North

171
524 American Indians is the buzz, a rectangular piece of wood or a circular disc of metal which is rotated on a twisted string, by drawing the hands apart, to produce a buzzing sound. It is recorded that the young weavers of 19th century Belfast were fond of playing with the "bummer," and I saw the toy, called a "snorer," in use in north-east Antrim this summer.

857
524 Many examples could be given of children's games and rhymes which retain memories of ancient rites. Thus it has been suggested that the game known as "Draw a pail of water" is "the attenuated survival of the religious rite of water worship." Similarly there are hints of foundation sacrifice in "the Devil's Bridge," of marriage by capture in "Nuts in May," of marriage by purchase in "Lords from Spain" and of funeral rites in "Jeannie Jo" and "Green Gravel." These games are not necessarily long established in Ireland—some of them were probably introduced by planters, as in the Appalachian region of the U.S.A.—but they are of wide occurrence and considerable age in other parts of Europe.

754 It is worth putting on record that the aid of magic is still sought in causing illness by making and injuring a wax model of someone to whom ill is wished. It is not five years since a case which resulted in death occurred within a short distance of Belfast.

789
821 I have no doubt that instances of curious love charms, of raising a wind and so on could still be found, though the old method of burying a black hen alive to bring a fair wind is probably forgotten. The so-called "protective formulæ" such as "God bless the work" and "I wish you luck of the baste" are common currency.

241
289 Harvest customs that deserve mention are the cutting of the last sheaf and the wearing of harvest knots. In the north of Ireland, as in many other parts of Europe, it was customary, so long as sickles were the reaping tools—the practice became modified with the use of scythes—for the harvesters to fling their hooks at the last plaited remnant of standing corn. This was known under various names such as neck, churn, hare, granny, carline and cailleach or "collya."

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A good deal of skill was required and " the contestants were 241 hindered by the unkind jokes of their friends. When the 289 cailleach was eventually " stretched " or " cut and dead," she was " waked," carried into the house or barn, and generally kept until the following year." To quote Mr. Paterson once more, " Sometimes a party followed the ceremony, at which it was usual for the boys and girls to wear harvest knots." I illustrate two examples of knots, one with the ears left on, which is done in three plait, and the other the more common two-straw pattern (Fig. 114). It has been claimed that the latter form is a late introduction from England, but it is known that the first type was worn by girls, in their hair, and the second by boys. They were often made before the actual cutting of the corn and are not necessarily associated with the ceremony of the last sheaf. Mr. Paterson tells me that in [431] Armagh they used to be exchanged between the sexes as a token of admiration or love.

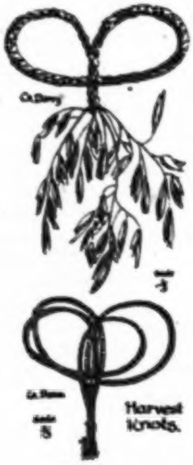

Fig. 114.

Finally we must not forget the countless superstitious 000 beliefs connected with birds and trees, with water beasts, and

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000 sea monsters, with animals both wild and tame, with red
hair, physical deformities and so on, nor the wealth of folk-lore
and folk tales which the Irish Folklore Commission is rescuing
from every barony in the country. A beginning has been
made in the immense task of sorting out, mapping and
interpreting these beliefs. One would like to know the
distribution of many persistent customs and practices, for
this is the best guide to their origin and significance. How
576 far south, for instance, does the typical Ulster greeting on
the road extend—that slow silent half-negative sideways nod
of the head? Some day it may be possible, as I wrote five
years ago, "to interpret the subtle differences between one
region and another which make up the attractive variety of
rural Ireland and provide sources of friendly rivalry and
rich humour."[1]

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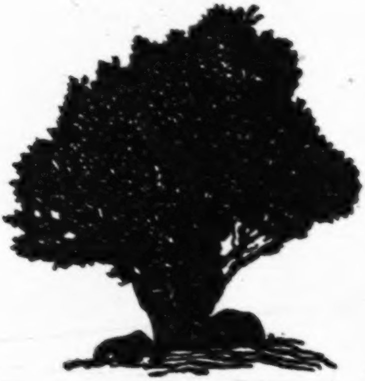

A Fairy Thorn

Y

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[1] *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, July 1935.

INDEX.

Italic figures refer to pages on which illustrations are given. Roman figures preceded by "Pl." refer to plates.

A

Achill I., 52, 93.
Acorns, 1, 39.
Agriculture, origin of, 27.
Agriculture. *See Crops.*
Aireacht, 157, 158.
Alder, 25, 31.
Andaman Is., 143.
Anglesea, 43.
Animals, domesticated, 27, 29, 32. *See also Horse, Cattle, etc.*
Animals, wild, 31, 60, 178.
Antrim, Co., 1, 16, 26, 52, 64, 66, 88, 94, 98, 101, 106, 115, 125, 126, 143, 146, 147, 158. *See also Glens.*
Aonach, 157.
Apples, 127, 156, 174.
Aran Is., 62, 84, 123, 127, 146, 150, 169, 170, 174.
Arch, 81.
Arensberg, C. M., 61, 161, 169.
Ark, meal, 70.
Armagh, Co., 68, 100, 114, 125, 127, 135, 139, 142, 171, 174.
Armorican Mts., 18.
Arrow-heads, flint, 163, 167.
Ash, 31, 40, 115, 117, 122, 123, 128.
——, wood-, *See Wood-ash.*
—— pit, 68.
Ass, 31, 32, 106, 150.
Assemblies, 10, 157.
Athenry, 139.
Athlone, 21.
Atlantic climate, 25.
—— province, 7, 9, 72.
Auction sales, 162.
Axes, stone, 29, 163, 167.

B

Backstone, 68.
Baile (Bally), 10.
Bait, 145.
Bakestone, 73, *74*.
Balks, 41, 50. *See also Mearings.*
Ballinasloe, 158.
Ballinderry, 87.
Ballintoy, 26.
Ballycastle, 83, 158.
Ballymoney, 137.
Baltic region, the, 109.
Bann, R., 26, 29, 37, 147.
Bap, 75.
Barbed wire, 43.
Bargain-striking, *162*.
Bargy and Forth, 12.
Barley, 30, 36.
Barn, 80, 125.
Barrenness, 11, 164.
Baronies, 12, 136.
Barrow, R., 26, 36.
Barrow, box, 106, 139, 140.
—— hand, 106.
—— turf, 106, 137, *138*.
Barts, 101.
Basalt, *17*, 18.
Baskets, apple, 127.
—— calf, *127*.
—— carrying, 106, 127, *128*, *140*.
—— farm, *102*, *103*.
—— line, 127, *128*.
—— potato, *73*.
Bastible, 75.
Beans, 34.
Beds, 60, 130, 131, 154.
Bed-wing, 60. *See also Outshot.*
Beehive, *128*, 129.

OOO

Beehive, chairs, 68.
—— houses, 81.
Bee-skep, 128.
Beech, 40.
Beer. heather, 77.
Bees, 32.
Beetles, *72*.
Beetling engines, 40.
Beets, 99.
Belfast, 1, 12, 20, 154, 176.
Beltane, 155, 167.
Besom, *71*, 76, 125.
Betting, 173.
Biddy boys, 154.
Bilberries, *See Fruogs*.
Billhooks, 117.
Binnen ropes, 79, *130*.
Birch, 25, 31, 40, 124.
Black houses, 60, 93.
Blackberries, 40.
Blackthorn, 41, 162.
Bladderwrack, 150.
Blockan, 145.
Blood letting, 78, 157.
Blood ties, 48, 159, 169.
Blue month, the, 77.
Boar, wild, 31.
Boats, 26, 34, 147, 174. *See also Curraghs*
Bogs, 24, 133f. *And see Turf.*
Bog auger, 142.
—— butter, 53.
—— iron, 34.
—— roads, 112, 142.
—— timber, 25, 40, 63, 70, 122, 123, 133, 141, Pl. I.
Boles, 70. *See also Keeping holes.*
Bone pin, *128*.
Bones, 30, 50. *See also Balks.*
Bonfires, 155f.
Booleys, 47f, 134, 155.
Booleying, 52f, 109. *See also Seasonal Nomadism.*
Bools, 75, 76, 147.
Boomer, 175. *See also Bull-roarer.*
Booths at fairs, 158.
Bohereens, 112.
Bowman, 108.
Box barrow. *See Barrow.*
Box car, 110, 111, Pl. IV.
Boxty bread, 77.
Boyne, R., 31, 58, 81, 114.
—— curragh, *27*, 126, 147.
Boys dressed as girls, 166.
Brace, chimney, 38, *69*.
Bramble, 40, 128.
—— scythe, 101.
Bread, 8, 73, 75.
Bread stick, *73*.
Breast plough, 93. *See also Flachter.*
—— slanes, *138*f.
Brittany, 7, 18, 169.
Bronze Age, 31, 39, 42, 78, 85, 110.
—— decoration, *31*.
Bronze cauldron, *30*, 76.
Bronze disc from R. Bann, *33*.
Buckies, 145.
Bull of harrow, 91.
Bull-baiting, 174.
Bull-roarer, 54, 174, *175*.
Bullauns, *165*.
Bullet throwing, 174.
Bullock's horn, *52*.
Bummer, 176.
Bunbeg curragh, Co. Donegal, *146*.
Burden (back) creels, 105, 150.
Burden ropes, 101, 105, *130*.
Burning the river, 147.
Buroch, 130.
Butter, 37, 53, 121, 146, 167.
Butter tubs, 121, *122*.
Butterfly cage, *54*.
Buttermilk, 77, 121.
Butts, 121.
Buzz, 176.
Byre, 53, 60, 79, 154.

C

Cabbage, 34, *129*, 157.
Cages, wickerwork and rush, *54*.
Cailey, 51.
Cailleach (Outshot), *59*, 60, 68, 70, 102.
—— (harvest), *176*.
Cairns, 31, 41, 156, 168, 169, 170.
Caithness, 81.
Caledonian Mts., 16, *17*.
Calf baskets, *127*.
Campbell, A., 53, 60.
Campion, E., 16.
Canopy, fire, 68, 69.
Car, box, 110, 111, Pl. IV.
— path, 142.
—, slide, 50, 105, *108*, Pl. IV.
—, wheel, 48, *149*, Pl. IV.
Carboniferous period, 18.
Carlingford Lough, 16, 18, 31, 150.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

000

Carlingford Mts., 81.
Carlow, Co., 19, 174.
Carpathian Mts., 54.
Carrageen moss, 151.
Carrantuohill, 20.
Carrying baskets, 106, *128*, *140*.
Carts, 105f, Pl. IV.
Castle of turf, 140, *141*.
Castle towns, 159.
Cattle, 8, 30, 32, 37, 53, 60, 78, 79, 88, 151, 152, 154, 155, 158, 168.
Cauldron, *31*, 78, 158.
Cavan, Co., 82, 114.
Caves (Souterrains), 85.
Ceilidhe. *See Cailey.*
Celtic crosses, 26.
—— culture, 12.
—— fringe, 2, 8.
—— language, 31, 52.
—— year, 153f, 164.
Celts, stone, 167. *See also Stone Axes.*
Central hearth, 58.
—— Plain, 16, *17*, 21, 37, 39.
Chairs, 67, 68.
Chalk, 18, 25.
Changeling, 166.
Charcoal, 31, 150.
—— burners, 39.
Chariots, 111.
Charms, 80, 167.
Cheese, 53, 151.
Chimney, 64, 70, *71*.
—— brace, 68, 69.
Christian influence, 34, 163.
Christmas, 77, 100, 157.
Churn, 53, 72, 102, 121, *122*, 167.
——, harvest, 176.
Cities, 159, 160.
Civic life, 5, 160.
Clachan, 47.
Claddagh, the, 156, 174.
Clamp, 85, 140.
Clare, Co., 79, 88, 93, 116, 117, 131.
Clare I., 55.
Clay pot, *30*.
Clear I., 12.
Cleaver, *127*.
Cleet, 51.
Climate, 7, 24, 35.
—— changes of, 19, 24, 25, 32, 39.
Clips, *94*.
Clochan, 84.
Clod-breaker, 88, 90.
Clover, 38, 50.
Clusters, house, *47*.
Cobbett, W., 75.
Cock-fighting, 174.
Cock, hay, 97.
Coiled basketry, 128.
Cole, G. A. J., 15.
Coles, 96.
Collar, horse, *70*, 130.
Collop. *See Sum.*
Comeragh Mts., 18, 20.
Communal practices, 11, 93, 134, 152. *And See Gatherings.*
Connacht, 16, 151.
Connemara, 16, 35, 64.
Coolnagoppoge, 136.
Cooring, 88.
Corbelling, 82, 85, 164.
Cork, Co., 12, 18, 150, 151, 174, 175.
Corn, 8, 100. *See also Oats.*
Corn-crake, 94.
Corn kilns, 85.
—— sieves, 124.
—— stacks, 102.
Corrag, 66.
Corrib R., 26, 147.
Coulter, 87, 89.
County. *See Antrim, etc.*
Coupled roof, *62*, 63.
Courtyard farms, 86.
Couvade, the, 172.
Cow dung, 68, 133.
Cows. *See Cattle.*
Cow's grass, 51.
Cow's horn cleaver, *127*.
—— handle, *137*.
—— tines, 91.
Crabs, 145, 151.
Crab-pot, *151*.
Cradle, 126.
Crane, *71*, 75, 76.
Cranked spade, *114*.
Crannogs, 87, 117.
Creaghts, 54.
Credit, 159.
Creels, 53, 105, 106, *107*, 126, Pl. V.
Creepie, 67.
Crib, *122*.
Croagh Patrick, 16.
Crook, *71*, 76.
—— shepherd's, 55.
Crop, horse-hair, 143, *144*.
Crops, 7, 8, 27, 35, 91, 133, 173.

Crops, blessing the, 156.
Crosses, 164.
—— Celtic, 26.
—— St. Bridget's, 80, *154*.
—— wooden, 169.
Crottle dye, 40.
Crusie lamp, 76, *152*.
Crutch. *See Straddle*.
Cush, 42.
Cup-marks, 164.
Curragh, Boyne, *27*.
—— oar, *147*, *149*.
—— paddle, 147, *148*.
—— rowing, *149*, Pl. VI.
Curraghs, 26, 123, 144, 147, *148*, *149*, 174, Pl. VI.
Curragh of Kildare, *17*, 38.
Cursing stones, 165.
Customs and beliefs, 163f, 171f.
Cyclones, 35.

D

Dallan, 124.
Dancing, 54, 161, 164, 173.
Dasher, churn, 121, *122*.
Davies, O., 91.
Debts, 11, 159.
Deer, giant, 19, 24, 31.
Deer, red, 31.
Deer trap, 26.
Delph, 72.
Denmark, 3.
Denshiring, 93.
Derry, 43.
Derry, Co. *See Londonderry*.
Dibber, *93*.
Digging fork, 93, 118, *119*.
—— stick, 30.
Disc-wheeled car, Pl. IV.
Dish, 111, 114, 137.
Ditch, 24, 40, *41*.
Dog, 30, 80, 146.
Dolmen, 38, Pl. II.
Domesticated animals. *See Animals*.
Donegal, Co., 35, 43, 48, 53, 66, 89, 98, 110, 113, 118, 122, 125, 126, 129, 131, 150, 155.
Donkey. *See Ass*.
Door, 61, 81.
Doors, opposite, 53, 61, 125.
Down, Co., 19, 36, 68, 80, 81, 108, 109, 143, 151, 175.
Drag, 91, 118.
Draining spade, *117*, 118.
Drammock, 77.
Dresser, 70.
Drill husbandry, 91.
Drogheda, 35.
Drumlins, *17*, 19, *20*.
Dubbing flax, 99.
Dublin, 1, 12, 35, 88, 110, 159, 160.
Dulse, 151.
Dundalk, 21.
Dye, 40, 127.

E

Ear-marking, 55.
Easter, 77, 155.
Eels, 29, 145, 147.
Eel-skin, 125.
Eel spears, 29, *144*, 147.
Einzelhöfe (Single farms), *49*.
Eire, 3, 159.
Elf-shot cattle, 167.
Elm, 31, 137.
English influence, 34, 39, 41, 64, 80, 86, 114, 161.
Errigal, 16, 20.
Eskers, *17*, 19, 24.
Evelyn, J., 39.
Excavation, 26, 29, 67, 128, 166.

F

Fack, 113, *116*.
Factory, spade, 115.
Fair day, 158, 161, *162*.
— hill, 158.
—, hiring, 157.
Fairies, 44, 163, 167.
Fairs, 10, 157f, 166, 171.
Fairy thorns, 168, *178*.
Family, 12, 159.
Famines, 35.
Farls, 75.
Farm basket, *102*, *103*.
—— buildings, 79f.
Farms, ladder, 41.
Farms, scattered, 47, 49.
Farms, size of, 3.
Faroe Is., 60.
Fences, 39f. *See also Ditches*.
Fermanagh, Co., 88, 114.
Fertility rites, 11, 164, 167, 173. *See also Sympathetic Magic*.
Festivals. *See Seasonal Festivals*.
Feudal system, 7.
Fiddle, sowing, 91.
Fiddler, 51, 66, 156, 173.
Fields, 39f.
—— prehistoric, 41, 42.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Fir, bog, 141, 147. *See also Bog timber*.
— hatchet, *140*, 141.
— lifter, *140*, 141.
— rope, *63*, 64, 88, 131, Pl. III.
— splits holder, 76.
Fire, 67f, 155f.
Fire draught, 61, 70.
— festivals, 155f, 164.
Fire, need, 155.
Fishing, 26, 143f.
Fish oil, 152.
— spears. *See spears*.
Fish-tail spade, *116*.
Flachter, 63, 91, 93, 118, *134*, *135*.
Flails, 88, 123, 124, *125*.
Flat roof, 84, *85*.
Flax, 37, 64, 125.
Flax-band, 99.
Flax-dam, 99.
Fleure, H. J., 8.
Flints, 18, 26, 29.
Flint arrow heads, 163, 167.
— charms, 80.
Floats, 127.
Folds, sheep, 55.
Food, 8, 73, 77f, 167.
Food-gathering, 27, 29.
Foot line, 143, 144.
— plates, *114*, 115.
— slane, 136f.
Footing of turf, 140, *141*.
Forests, 20, 24, 25, 32, 39.
Fork, digging, 93, 118, *119*.
— hay, *119*.
— turf, *119*, 139.
Forked spade. *See Gowl-gob*.
Forts. *See Raths*.
France, 15.
Friendship, 48, 159.
Frog (for fishing), 143, *144*.
Fraochán, 156. *See also Fruogs*.
Fruog basket, 55.
Fruogs, 54, 156.
Fuchsia, 43.
Fullered mould, 115.
Funerals, 169, 171, 176.
Furze. *See Whins*.
Fyams, 150.

G

Gable hearth, 58.
Gables, 58, 64.
Gaelic tradition, 52. *And see under Celtic*.
Gaeltacht, 2, 37, 61, 81.
Gahan, Miss, 128.
Gale days, 155.
Galtee Mts., 18.
Galway, Co., 12, 37, 60, 64, 96, 113, 116, 117, 125, 138, 144, 146, 158, 160, 172.
Games, seasonal, 52, 143, 156, 161, 164, 174.
— wake, 169
Gardens, 34, 50.
Gates, 39f, 43, *44*, 45.
Gate-piers, *43*, *82*.
Gatherings, 10, 51, 55, 157.
Gaugers, 51.
Gavelkind, 51.
Geese, 32, 54.
Gentry, the, 168. *See also Fairies*.
Gentry bushes, 168.
Giants, 163.
Giants' graves, 30. *See also Dolmen and Megaliths*.
Glacial period, 18f.
— deposits, 19, 30.
Glaiks, 121.
Glashan, 145.
Glens of Antrim, the, 101, 105, 108, 110, 154, 155.
Goat, 30, 32, 38, 43, 54.
Gold objects, 31.
Golden Vale, the, *17*, 37.
Goose-wing, 76.
Gorse. *See Whins*.
Gowl-gob, 119.
Graffan, 93, 118.
Graip, 118, 139, 140.
Granite, 16, 18, 91.
Granny, the, 176.
Greece, ancient, 175.
Griddle, 73, *75*.
Groop, 80.
Guy Fawkes, 156.

H

Haddon, A. C., 6, 175.
Haggard, 50, 98.
Half door, 61, 80.
Hallowe'en, 50, 52, 77, 87, 103, 155, 156, 174.
Hampers, 126.
Hand stave, 124.
— turf, 140.
Hanging. *See Mid-kipple*.
Hare, 176.
Harnen stands, *74*, 75.
Harness, straw, 108, 130, Pl. IV

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

OOO

Harpoon, 150.
Harrows, 87, 88, 91.
Harvard University Mission, 26.
Harvest, 95f.
—, corn, 35, 55, 100, frontispiece
— customs, 101, 161, 176.
—, hay, 95.
— knots, 101, *177*.
Havels, 98.
Hay cart (Rick-lifter), 98, 101.
— fork, *110*.
— harvest, 95.
— knife, *134*, 141.
— lapping, 96.
— rope, 43, 129. *See also Sugán*.
— sweep, 98.
Hazel, 25, 31, 40, 124, 126, 128, 145, 166.
Hazel nuts, 1, 39, 156, 166.
Hearths, prehistoric, 29, 67.
Heather, 53, 64.
— beer, 77.
— thatch, 64.
Hebrides, the, 10, 60, 147.
Helve. *See Hand stave*.
Hen's nest, 72, *129*.
Hen house, *82*.
Hencken, H. O'N., 87.
Hens, 32, 37, 55, 68, 176.
Herbs, 78.
Hercynian Mts., *17*, 18.
Herding, 51, 55.
Herring, 77, 145.
Highland Britain, 7, 34.
Highlands, the. *See Scotland*.
Hipped roof, 58, 59, 84.
Hiring fairs, 157.
Hobbling, 130.
Hoe, 93, 94, 118.
Holer, 138.
Hollan, 68.
Holly, 40, 124.
Holy wells. *See Wells*.
Homespun industry, 2, 37, 127.
Honey, 78.
Hooks, fish, 145.
Horn, bullock's, *52*.
— cow's, 91, *127*, *137*.
Hornell, J., 147.
Horns, long, 54.
Horse, 30, 38, 87, 88, 139.
Horse brasses, 111.
— hair, 106, 109, 131, 143, 144.
Horse, harness, 108, 130, Pl. IV.
— racing, 38, 143, 173.
Hospitality, 52, 67.
House clusters, 47, *49*.
— types, 57, 59.
Houses, black, 66, 93.
— Neolithic, 58, 67.
— shaken, 64.
— soot, 93.
— stitched, 64.
— sweat, 82, *83*.
Hovels, 102.
Hudson, W. H., 13.
Hungry grass, the, 167.
Hunting, 31.
Hunting the wren, 157.
Hurley, 173.
Huts, 101.

I

Ice Age, the, 18f.
Industrial Revolution, 1, 3, 6, 98, 113.
Inishowen, 44.
Inishturk, 64.
Inishmurray, 169.
Inishere, Aran, Pl. V.
Irish Folklore Commission, 5, 178.
Irish Homespun Association, 128.
Iron Age, Early, 32, 95, 111, 117.
Iron ore, 34.
Iron pot, *31*, 73, 75.
Iron working, 34.
Irons, plough, 87.

J

Jamb wall, 68, 69.
— window, 68, 69.
Jefferies, R., 101.
Joggler, *122*.
Joyce, P. W., 12.
Jura, 151.
Jutland, 41.

K

Keeler, 121.
Keening, 169.
Keeping holes, 70, *71*, 80.
Kelp, 146, 150.
Kelp drags, 150, *151*.
— hooks, 150, *151*.
— kilns, 145, *150*.
Kerry Co., 12, 18, 34, 53, 64, 81, 93, 117, 131, 152, 154, 172.
Kib, 113, 118.

Kildare, Co., 38.
Kilkenny, Co., 88, 116.
Kilns, corn, 85.
— kelp. *See Kelp*.
King, 51.
King's Co. *See Offaly*.
Kish, 108, 110, 126, 139, Pl. IV
Kishauns, 128.
Kitchen, 53, 77.
Kitchen byre, 60.
—— middens, 26.
Kneading turf, 140.
Knight, P., 158.
Knitting, 54, 106.
Knocknarea, 31.
Knuckle-dusters, *161*.

L

La Tène, 32, 117.
La Tène decoration, *33*.
Ladder farms, 41.
Ladle, 72, 122, *123*.
Lammas, 156.
Lammas fairs, 83, 157.
Landlords, 11, 43, 111.
Landscape, the, 23f, 29f.
Langles, 129, 130.
Lapping hay, 96.
Larch, 124, 137.
Larne, 26.
Lazy-beds, 91, *92*.
Legananny "Dolmen," Pl. II.
Leinster, 118.
Leitrim, Co., 93, 114.
Leix, 117.
Licence at fairs, 11, 161.
Lift, cranked and round, 114.
Light-holders, *76*.
Lime burning, 132.
Limpets, 145.
Limerick, Co., 19, 42, 43, 63, 68, 117, 127.
Limestone, 16, 30, 37, 38.
Line-baskets, 127, *128*.
Linen, 100.
Lines, long, 146.
Ling, 145.
Lint. *See Flax*.
Lint band, 99.
Lint hole, 99.
Lipe work, 128.
Loanings, 112.
Lobster-pots, 126, *151*.
Loft, 68.
Londonderry, Co., 43, 60, 78, 119, 137.
Long bullets, 174.
Long house, 61, 83.
Long line fishing, 146.
Longford, Co., 117, 130.
Lonny. *See Dasher*.
Lough Corrib, 21.
—— Erne, 19, 20.
—— Mask, 20.
—— Neagh, 20, 26, 63, 127, 147, 161.
—— Swilly, 16, 18.
Louth, Co., 36, 81.
Low back car, *109*, 110, Pl. IV.
Loy, 30, 89, 92, 93, *113*, 116, 117, 135, 136.
Luck money, 162.
Lug worm, 145.
Lugnaquilla, 20.
Lump, 97. *See also Sum*.
Lures, 145.
Lurgan spade, 114.
Lythe, 145.

M

Macalister, R. A. S., 175.
MacLysaght, E., 124.
MacNeill, E., 158.
Magic, 11, 163, 166.
Magilligan, 119.
Main, R., 37.
Maize, 34, 75, 77.
Mangels, 37.
Mannering, 90.
Manure, 92, 93, 106, 108.
—— seaweed, 150.
Maps, 7, 9, *17*, *36*, *49*, *169*.
Market town, *159*.
Marking, ear, 55.
Marriage, age of, 11.
Marriage by capture, 176.
—— customs, 157, 171f.
Marrom grass, 64, Pl. III.
Mask, wedding, *172*.
Mason, T. H., 124.
Mattress, straw, 129.
Maul, 42. *See also Mell*.
May day, 155.
— games, 173.
— Queen, 155.
May-flower, 155.
Mayo, Co., 64, 68, 72, 81, 117, 119, 129, 139, 158, 170, 172, 174.
Mead, 78.
Meadow hay, 97.
Meal sieve, 124.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Mearings, 50, 95. *See also Balks.*
Meath, Co., 21, 37, 40, 42, 44, 53, 87, 88, 96, 140.
Mediterranean Region, the, 27, 30, 58, 163, 168.
Megalithic cult, the, 30, 163, 164f 169.
Megaliths, 30, 38, 170, Pl. II.
Mell, 90, 130.
Mesolithic period, 25, 27, 30, 128.
Methers, 72.
Metropolitan region, 21.
Mid-kipple, 124.
Midlands, the, 23, 113, 137.
Midsummer, 155, 164.
Milking, 79, 155.
Milk, warming, 78.
Mitchell, A., 167.
Mogey, J. M., 26, 140.
Monaghan, Co., 114, 142.
Moon, 77.
Moraines, *17.*
Morrowing, 88.
Moss, 130. *See also Turf Bogs.*
Mould board, 89.
Mountain draining spade, *117.*
Mountains, settlements in, 30.
Mourne Mts., 18, 109, 114.
Muckish, 16.
Mud coping, *64.*
— floor, 67.
— turf, 140.
— walls, 61, 64.
Mudyees. *See Tongs.*
Murphy, M. J., 174.

N

Navan Fort, 159.
Neck, the, 176.
Need fires, 155.
Neolithic period, 10, 27, 29.
Nets, fishing, 140.
New Grange, 21, 31.
New Stone Age. *See Neolithic.*
New World, the, 34, 77.
New Year, 153, 157.
Nicknames, 48.
Noddies, 110.
Noggin, 72, 122, *123.*
Nomadism, 8. *See also Seasonal nomadism.*
Nore, R., 36.
Norman influence, 34, 159.
Norsemen, 34, 159.
Northern Ireland, 37. *See also Six Counties and Ulster.*
Norway. *See Scandinavia.*
Nuts, hazel. *See Hazel.*

O

Oak, 25, 31, 43, 121, 122.
Oak, bog. *See Bog timber.*
Oar, curragh. *See Curragh.*
Oatcake toasters, *74.*
Oatcakes, 73, 75, 155, 167, 172.
Oatmeal, 8, 70, 77, 124, 167, 171.
Oats, 8, 34, 91, 95, 128.
O'Brien, M. A., 156.
O'Curry, E., 174.
Offaly (King's Co.), 88.
O'Kelly, B., 151.
Old Stone Age. *See Palæolithic.*
O Lochlainn, C., 60.
Onsets, 47.
Openfield cultivation, 41. *See also Rundale.*
Orchards, 34, 127.
O'Riordain, S. P., 42, 63.
Orkney Is., 60, 81.
Osier, 106. *See also Sally.*
Otter, 146.
Outshot, 59, 60, 68, 70, 72.
Oven, pot, *75.*
Oven tradition, 72.

P

Paddle curragh, *27.*
Pale, the, 21, 39.
Palæolithic period, 11, 25.
Pampooties, 123.
Pardons, 164.
Paring and burning, 93.
Parings, bog, 134.
Pastoral tradition, 8, 52, 54, 55.
Paterson, T. G. F., 44, 142, 177.
Patterns, 164.
Peasant culture, 5, 30.
Peat. *See Turf.*
Peate, I. C., 81.
Pegged thatch, *64,* Pl. III.
Pennant, T., 151.
Pictish tongue, 31.
Pig sty, 37, 81, *83.*
Pigeons, 80.
Piggin, 53, 72, 121, *122.*
Pigs, 30, 37, 151.
Pike, hay, 98.
Pike, iron, 102, *119.*
Pin wells, 164.
Pine, 25, 31. *See also Bog timber.*
Piper, 51, 54, 156.

Plans, 150
Plantation, the, 101
Plates, spade, 115 *See also Foot-plates.*
Plough, 30, 87, *89*
—— breast, 93, 135 *See also Flachter.*
—— skinning, 93
—— -team, 87, 88
Ploughing by the tail, 87
Ploughshare, 87, *89*.
Poaching, 147
Pole lathe, 122
Pollack *See Lythe.*
Pollen analysis, 24, 31
Population, 47, 152, *159*, *160*.
Porch, 64
Pot, crab, *151*
Pot hanger *See Crook.*
Pot-hole, 67
Pot, lobster, 123, *151*
Pot oven, 75
Pot rest, 67.
Pot, stock, 120
Pot, three-legged, *30*, 67, 75.
Potato basket, *73*.
Potato bread, 75
—— clamp, 103
Potatoes, 15, 34, 37, 50, 72, 77, 91, 102, 128, 145
Poteen, 30, 37, 78, 172.
Pots, fashions in, *30*
Pottery, 10, 29, *30*, *31*
Poultry, 37, 53, 81
Praty *See Potatoes.*
Ptolemy, 158
Pumice, 152
Purlin, 63, *64*.

Q

Quartz, 170
Quartzite Mts., 16, *20*.
Queen's County *See Leix.*
Queen's University, Belfast, 168.
Querns, 30, 85

R

Racing, horse, 38, 143.
Raftery, J., 175.
Rainfall, 35, 36.
Raised beaches, 20, 26, 146.
Raising a wind, 175, 176
Rampar, 142.
Rannel tree, 79.
Rathlin I., 12, 43, 51, 82, 134, 152.
Raths, 32, 41, 42, 44, *90*, 117, 163, 167.
Rattle, rush, *54*.
Rays, 100.
Reaping hook, *100*.
Reeks of Kerry, the, 18.
Reeves, W., 12.
Retting flax, 99.
Revel tree, 79.
Rib-length, 63.
Ribs *See Balks.*
Rick, 85, 97.
Rick-lifter, 98, 101, 105.
Rickles, 140.
Riddle, *124*.
Ridge and furrow, 90.
Ridgeways, 112.
Ritual, 11, 52, 161, 173.
River net, *146*, 147.
Roads, 48, 111, 112, 142.
Roman influence, 34.
Roof, coupled, 62, 63.
—— hipped, 58, 59.
—— flat, *85*.
Roof scraws, 63, 93, 131.
Roof with purlins, 63, *64*, *68*.
Roofs, thatched, Pl. III.
Room, the, 61, 70.
Room, the West, 61.
Rope twisters, *129*.
Rope twisting, 97, 128.
Ropes, thatch, 64, 99.
Ropes *See Binnen and Burden. Also Fir-ropes and Sugán.*
Roscommon, Co., 88, 114.
Rotation of crops, 7, 95.
Rowan, 40, 79, 126, 167.
Royal Dublin Society, the, 88.
Rundale agriculture, 41, 50, 87, 100, 155.
Running, 141.
Rush crosses, *154*.
Rush-light holders, 75.
Rush rope, *130*.
—— toys, *54*, *55*.
Rushes, 64, 67, 130, 153.
Rye, 34, 64, 128, Pl. III.

S

Sally (willow), 40, 43, 64, 122, 126, 128.
Salt, 50, 167, 169, 171.
Sampson, G. V., 43.
Sandstone, New Red, 18.
—— Old Red, 16.
Santiago da Compostella, 164.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Scandinavia, 15, 54, 61, 97.
Scattered farms. *See Farms*
Scollop thatch, 64, 65, Pl. III.
Scollop thatcher's tools, 65.
Scotland, 16, 25, 43, 44, 48, 54, 88, 91, 105, 109, 167.
Scrabo Hill, 90.
Scraws, 42, 53, 63, 134.
Scutching flax, 100.
Scythe, 95, 101.
Scythe hook, *100*.
Seals, 150.
Seaports, 150, 161.
Seasonal festivals, 11, 52, 143, 153f, 163, 171.
—— nomadism, 10, 52, 73, 112.
Seashore, the, 143f.
Seaweed, 143, 150, 151.
Seedtime, 87f, 161.
Settle, 70.
Shannon, R., 21, 26, 147.
Shark, 150.
Sheep, 30, 53, 55, 157, 158.
Sheephaven Curragh, making of, Pl. VI.
Sheep pens, 55.
—— shearing, 55.
Shell-fish, 26, 145, 151, 152.
Shelling Hills, 123.
Shepherd, 54.
Shepherd's crook, 55.
Sheugh, 90.
Shillelagh, 162.
Shovel, 93, 118, *119*, 140.
Shows, 64, 100.
Shrove, 77, 171.
Siberia, 109.
Sickle, *100*, 151.
Side creels, 105, 106, *107*, 150.
Sieves, 122, 141.
Six Counties, the, 113, 159. *See also Northern Ireland and Ulster*.
Skeehogue (Skib), *73*, Pl. V.
Skellig Michael, 84.
Skep, bee, 128.
Skib, *73*, Pl. V.
Skin back-protector, 123, 150.
—— shoes, 123.
—— sieves, 123.
—— trays, 123, *124*.
—— window cover, 62, 123.
Skins, 62, 123, 124.
Slanes, 118, *137*, *138f*.
Slaters, 145.
Sleighs, 100.
Slide car, 50, 105, *108*, Pl. IV.
Slieve Bloom, 156.
—— Croob, 156.
—— Donard, 20.
Sligo, Co., 18, 114, 172.
Slim-bread, 75.
Slingers, 174.
Slipe, 105, 106, *108*.
Sloke, 151.
Snorer, 170.
Sock, plough, 87, *89*, 135.
Sod, 42, 53, 63. *See also Scraws*.
Sod houses, 61.
Solid wheeled car, *109*, Pl. IV.
Soot houses, 93.
Soppers, 172.
Souple, 124.
Souterrains, 85.
Sowens, 77, 153.
Sowing Corn, 91.
Spade, diamond, *137*, 138.
——, draining, *117*.
—— factory, 113, 115, 136.
——, one-eared, *113*, *116*.
—— taper, *113*, 114.
—— tree, 117, *137*.
——, two-eared, *113*.
Spades, 90, 92, 113f.
Spades, turf, 136f, *136*, *137*.
Spain, 15, 34, 52.
Spancelling, 50, 55, 95, 129, 130.
Spear-shafts, 39.
Spear thrower, 175.
Spears, eel, 29, *144*, 147.
—— salmon, 29, *144*, 147.
Sperrin Mts., 16, 37.
Spinning, 54.
Splits, fir, 40, 76, 141.
Spoke-wheeled car, Pl. IV.
Spoons, wooden, 122.
Spreading turf, 138f.
Spud-stone, 44.
St. Bridget's Crosses, 80, *154*.
—— Eve, 153.
St. John's Eve, 155, 164.
St. Martin's Eve, 157.
St. Patrick's Day, 50, 154, 155.
St. Stephen's Day, 157.
Stable, 80.
Stacks. *See Corn, Turf, etc.*
Staddels, 102.
Stamp, *93*.
——, butter, *123*.
Stamp, L. D., 38.
Standing stones, 11, 42, 166.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Stapples, 102.
Steeveen, 93.
Stile, *43*, 66.
Stock-pot, 126.
Stone axes, 29, 163, 167.
—— lids, 72, *122*.
—— sinker, 145, *146*.
—— toaster, *74*.
—— throwing, 174.
—— walls, 41.
—— weight, *146*.
Stookies, 146.
Stooks, 99, 100, 101.
Straddle, *106*, *107*.
Strangford Lough, 145.
Straps, spade, 115, 136.
Straw-boys, 172.
—— harness, 108, 130, Pl. IV.
—— mats, 60, 106, *107*, 129.
—— ropes, 67, 79, 124, 128, 129, 130. *See also Sugán*.
Streaming, 145.
Struell, 82.
Sub-Atlantic climate, 25, 32, 95.
Sub-Boreal climate, 25, 30.
Sudan, the, 147.
Sugán, 43, 63, 66, 67, 70, 79, 80, 88, 106, 108, 124, 128, 129, 151.
Sugán making, 97.
Sugar beet, 37, 102.
Suir, R., 30, 127.
Sums, 54.
Superstitions, 11, 40, 44, 61, 77, 152, 155, 163, 169, 177.
Swapping labour, 99.
Sweat houses, 82, *83*.
Sweden, 108.
See also Scandinavia.
Sweep, hay, 98.
Switzerland, 52.
Sycamore, 40, 122.
Sympathetic magic, 11, 166.

T

Table, 72.
Tam o' Shanter, 123.
Tangle, 150.
Taper spade, *113*, 114.
Tara, 21, 159.
Tates, 130.
Teasels, 63.
Tents (at fairs), 158.
Tethering, 50, 55, 95, 129.
Thatch, 57, *63*, 93, 128.
Thewin, 77.
Thin bread, 8, 73.
Thistle pullers, *94*.
Thorn trees, 40, 168.
Thorn, lone, *178*.
Thrashing, 80, 125.
Thraw hooks, *129*.
Three field system, 87.
Thunderbolts, 167.
Timber, bog. *See Bog*.
Timber, hedgerow, 40.
Tipperary, Co., 88.
Toasters, oatcake, *74*, 75.
Toasting fenders, 75.
Tongs, *71*, 76.
Toome, 29.
Torr Head, 52.
Tory I., 51, 124, 134, 147, 152.
Tow, 100.
Town, castle, 159.
—— fair, 48, 53, 158.
Townland, 10, 12, 41, 48.
Towns. *See House clusters*.
Towns, origins of, 158f.
Tramp cocks, 97.
Tramping the meal, 70.
Trams, 111.
Transhumance. *See Seasonal nomadism*.
Tree roots in bog, Pl. I.
Troander, 77.
Troubles, the, 85, 174.
Trundle, 139.
Trusty, 162.
Tuam, 106.
Turf barrow, 106, 137, *138*.
—— bogs, 24, 25, 133f.
—— carrier, *140*.
—— cutting, 53, 136f.
—— fork, *119*, 139.
—— pad, 142.
—— houses, 80, 93.
—— spades, 136f.
—— stack, 81, 85, *141*.
Turnips, 37, 50, 93, 102.
Turn-foots, 140.
Twelve Pins, the, 16, 20.
Tyrol, the, [illegible]8.
Tyrone, Co., 78, 114, 122.

U

Ulster, 2, 43, 54, 77, 96, 118, 178.
Underfoot turf, 136.
Upland hay, 97.

V

Vikings. *See Norsemen*.
Village system, 47f, 49, 51, 93, 112.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

W

Waggons, 109, 111.
Wake games, 169.
Wakefield, E., 174.
Wakes, 11, 169.
Walling, dry, 42, 58.
Wales, 8, 48, 55, 61, 72, 81, 109, 127, 151.
Walmsley, T., 26.
Wart wells, 165.
Wassock, 66.
Waterford, Co., 12, 146.
Wattles, 126, 129. *See also Wicker-work.*
Weavers' candlesticks, 76.
Weddings. *See Marriages.*
Wee folk, the, 167. *See also Fairies.*
Weeding, 94.
Well cover, *84*.
Wells, holy, 11, 82, 163.
West Room, the, 61.
Westmeath, Co., 87.
Wexford, Co., 12, 35, 86, 91, 118, 169.
Whammeled bowls, 72.
Wheat, 7, 30, 35, 87, 128.
Whee-doodle, 175. *See also Bull-roarer.*
Wheel, 110f, 157.
Wheel bellows, 69, 70.
—— car, 48, *109*.
Whey, 53, 77.
Whins, 41, 42.
Whiskey, 78.
Whistles, 54.
Whitemeats, 53.
Whitethorn. *See Thorn.*
Whitewash, 43, 61, 68, 81, 170.
Whorls, spinning, 163, 167.
Wicker-work, 53, 58, 62, 66, 68, 126.
Wicklow, Co., 14, 31, 37, 78.
Wight, 123, *124*.
Wild animals, 31, 60.
Willow, 24, 31, 124. *See also Sally.*
Windows, 62, 123.
Windows in creels, 106, *107*, 126, *140*.
Winkles, 151.
Winnowing, 123.
Winnowing tray, 88, 123.
Wolf, 31.
Women, work of, 10, 54, 152.
Wood-ash, 143.
Wood-working, 3, 40.
Wooden crane, 76.
—— plough, *89*.
—— vessels. *See Noggin, Piggin and Butter Tub, etc.*
Woodlands, 39f. *See also Forest.*
Woody, 79.
Wrack. *See Seaweed.*
Wren, hunting the, 157.

Y

Yarn holder, *126*, 128.
Yew, 40, 90.
Young, A., 37, 39, 40, 55, 75, 158.